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R. W. Johnson *Post-Apartheid Blues*

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Peter Thomas *Labriola's Legacies*

Miroslav Hroch *Lessons from Bohemia*

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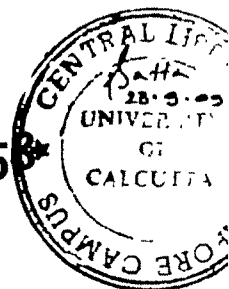
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MIROSLAV HROCH: Learning from Small Nations

Leading scholar of national questions discusses his personal trajectory and theoretical development, against the backdrop of the Czech experience. Sociological and historical roots of national feeling, and comparative perspectives on their European destinies.

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Disappointments of post-apartheid rule, marred by mass unemployment and corruption, amid the enrichment of a new black elite. Does the arrival of Zuma, and new salience of the SACP within the ruling alliance, portend a lurch to ethnic conflict and capital flight?

PATRICK BOND: In Power in Pretoria?

Responding to Johnson, Patrick Bond locates the origins of the ANC's neoliberal record since 1994 in the compromises of the transition era. Rhetoric versus reality, and the subordination of trade unions and SACP alike to capital's prerogatives.

ETIENNE BALIBAR: Althusser and the Rue d'Ulm

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MAX GASNER on Robert Kagan, *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*. The 21st century as re-run of the 19th, shaped by the ambitions of ascendant autocratic powers.

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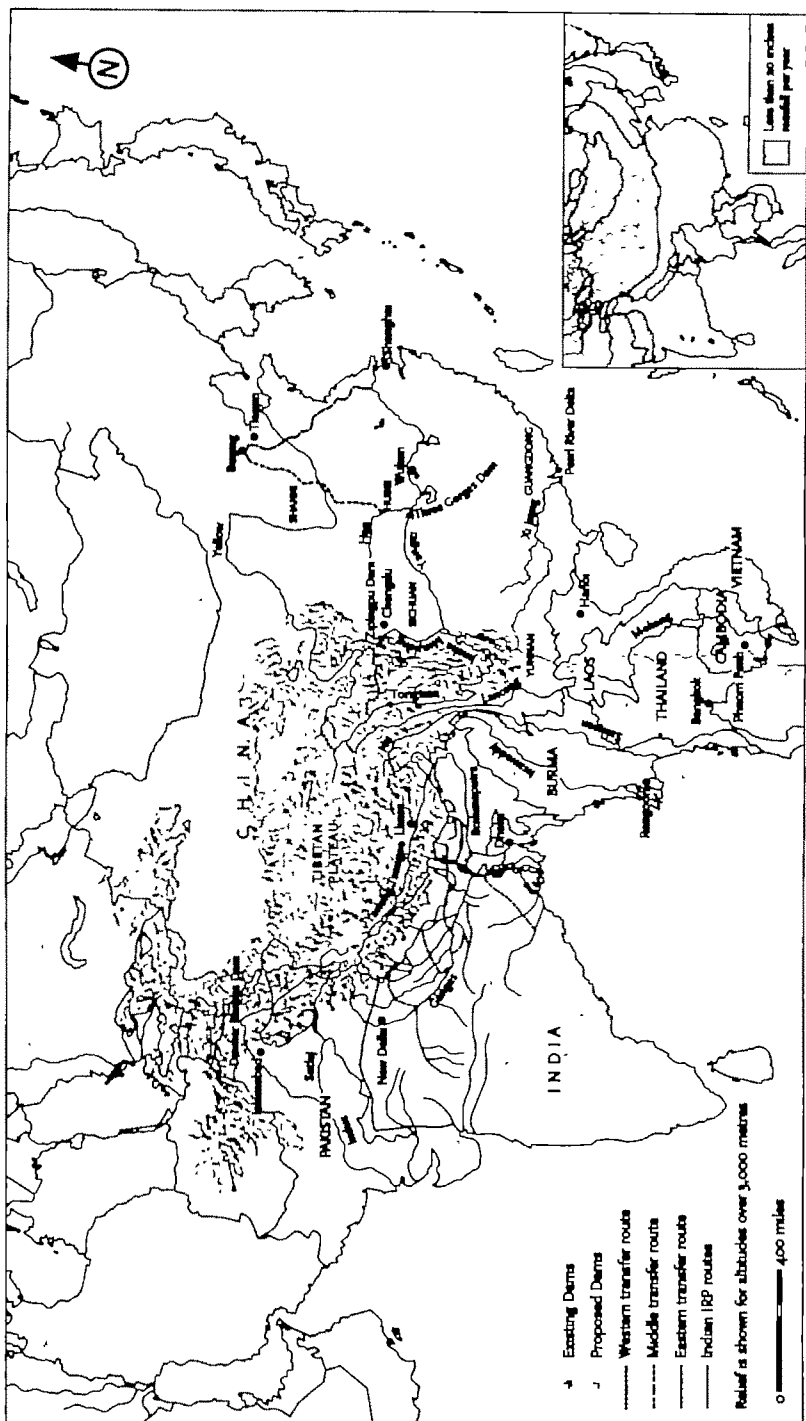
KENNETH POMERANZ

THE GREAT HIMALAYAN WATERSHED

Agrarian Crisis, Mega-Dams and the Environment

SINCE WE TEND to take water for granted, it is almost always a bad sign when it is in the news; and lately there has been all too much water-related news from some of Asia's most populous nations.* The stories have ranged from the distressingly familiar—suicides of drought-hit Indian farmers—to the surprising: evidence that pressure from water in the reservoir behind the new Zipingpu dam may have triggered the massive Sichuan earthquake in May 2008, for example.¹ Meanwhile glaciers, which almost never used to make the news, are now generating plenty of worrisome headlines.

For almost half the world's population, water-related dreams and fears intersect in the Himalayas and on the Tibetan plateau. Other regions have their share of conflicting claims over water issues: Turkey, Syria and Iraq over the headwaters of the Tigris; Israel and its neighbours around the Jordan basin; the US and Mexico over the Colorado River; the riparian states of the Paraguay, the Parana or the Nile. But none combine the same scale of population, scarcity of rainfall, dependence on agriculture, scope for mega-dam projects and vulnerability to climate change as those at stake within the greater Himalayan region. Here, glaciers and annual snowmelts feed rivers serving just under half of the world's population, while the unequalled heights from which their waters descend could provide vast amounts of hydro-power. At the same time, both India and China face the grim reality that their economic and social achievements since the late 1940s—both 'planned' and 'market-based'—have



depended on unsustainable rates of groundwater extraction; hundreds of millions of people now face devastating shortages.

In response, plans are moving forward to harness Himalayan waters through the largest series of construction projects in human history. Looked at individually, some of these carry enormous risks and, even if they work as planned, will hurt large numbers of people while helping others. Looked at collectively—as overlapping, sometimes contradictory demands on environments that will also feel some of the sharpest effects of global warming over the next several decades—their interactions will be extraordinarily complex and their possible implications are devastating. Since many of the agencies responsible for these projects are far from transparent, it is very difficult to keep track of the rapidly multiplying future scenarios. But some basic outlines do emerge if we start from China—for various reasons, the most dynamic actor in the story—and then survey the broad belt of lands that border it to the south.

Chinese shortages

Water has always been a problem in China, and effective control of it has been associated with both personal heroism and legitimate sovereignty for as far back as our records go—or perhaps even further, since the mythological sage-king Yu proved his right to rule by controlling floods. But water scarcity has perhaps been an even greater problem than excess, especially in the modern period. Surface and near-surface water per capita in China today is roughly a quarter of the global average, and worse yet, it is distributed very unevenly. The north and northwest, with about 380 million people, almost 30 per cent of the population, and over half the country's arable land, have about 7 per cent of its surface water, so per capita resources there are roughly 20–25 per cent of the average for

* I would like to thank Mark Selden and Mark Elvin for their comments on this piece.

¹ Sharon LaFraniere, 'Possible Link Between Dam and China Quake', *New York Times*, 6 February 2009; Richard Kerr and Richard Stone, 'A Human Trigger for the Great Quake of Sichuan?', *Science*, January 2009; Lei Xinglin, Ma Shengli, Wen Xueze, Su Jinrong and Du Fang, 'Dibiao shuiti dui duanceng yingli yu dizhen shikong fenbu yingxiang de zonghe fenxi: yi Zipingpu shuiku wei li', *Dizhen Dizhi* [*Seismology and Geology*], vol. 30, no. 4, December 2008. A number of scientists had warned several years ago that the reservoirs of the Three Gorges Dam might trigger earthquakes, though on a much smaller scale than the quake that Zipingpu may have caused. See Gavan McCormack, 'Water Margins: Competing Paradigms in China', *Critical Asian Studies*, vol. 33, no. 1, March 2001, p. 13.

China as a whole, and less than 6 per cent of the global average.² Northern waters also carry heavier sediment loads: most readings on southern rivers fall within EU maxima for drinking water, while some on the Wei, Yongding and the middle and lower Yellow Rivers are 25 to 50 times that level; water shortages are such that northern rivers also carry far more industrial pollutants per cubic meter, even though the South has far more industry.³ Northern China has unusually violent seasonal fluctuations in water supply, too; both rainfall and river levels change much more over the course of the year than in Europe or the Americas. North China's year-to-year rainfall fluctuations are also well above average, although not as severe as those in north and northwest India. While the most famous of China's roughly 90,000 large and medium-sized dams are associated with hydro-power—about which more below—a great many exist mostly to store water during the peak flow of rivers for use at other times.

The People's Republic has made enormous efforts to address these problems and achieved impressive short-term successes, which are now

² Such numbers vary depending on definitions of regions and ways of measuring water supply, but not enough to affect the general conclusions. Here I define 'north and northwest China' to include the provinces of Hebei, Shandong, Shanxi, Shaanxi, Henan and Gansu, plus Beijing and Tianjin municipalities; my figures are derived from Charles Greer, 'Chinese Water Management Strategies in the Yellow River Basin', PhD dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1975, p. 96. For comparison see. Olli Varis and Pertti Vakkilainen, 'China's Eight Challenges to Water Resources Management', *Geomorphology* 41, 2001, p. 94, which defines the North China Plain as containing 34 per cent of China's population, 39 per cent of its arable land and 6 per cent of its river run-off; US Embassy in China, 'South-North Water Transfer Ready to Start Work', *Beijing Environment, Science and Technology Update*, 16 November 2001, p. 2, describes a larger North, containing 44 per cent of the population, 60 per cent of its arable land, and 15 per cent of its water; James Nickum, 'The Status of the South to North Water Transfer Plans in China', *Occasional Papers: Topical Background Research for the HDR*, gives estimates for the Huang-Huai-Hai plain of 33 per cent of population, 40 per cent of farmland and 8 per cent of water supply. The map labeled 'Water Resources Distribution in China' in Pan Jiazheng (Chinese National Committee on Large Dams), ed., *Large Dams in China: History, Achievements, Prospects*, Beijing 1987, makes the regional disparities look even larger. Mark Elvin, 'Water in China's Past and Present: Cooperation and Competition', *Nouveaux Mondes* 12, 2003, pp. 117–20, improves on some of these numbers by incorporating estimates for groundwater as well as surface water resources, but the basic regional distinctions remain of similar magnitude. His total 'north' would include 46 per cent of China's population, with just below 15 per cent of all available water resources, and thus about 20 per cent of the per capita supplies.

³ Elvin, 'Water in China', pp. 124–5.

extremely vulnerable. Irrigated acreage has more than tripled since 1950, mostly during the Maoist period, with the vast majority of those gains coming in the north and northwest. It was this, more than anything else, that turned the notorious 'land of famine' of the 1850–1950 period into a crucial grain-surplus area, and contributed mightily to improving per capita food supplies for a national population that has more than doubled since 1949. Irrigation made it possible for much of northern China to grow two crops a year for the first time in history, often by adding winter wheat, which needs a lot of water; and plentiful, reliable supplies of water were necessary to allow the use of new seed varieties and chemical fertilizers, which can otherwise burn the soil. And, of course, irrigation greatly reduced the problem of rain coming at the wrong time of year, or not at all. During the previous two centuries, farming in northern China had become steadily more precarious, in part because population growth had lowered the water table—early 20th-century maps show much smaller lakes than 150 years before, and there are many reports of wells needing to be re-drilled at great expense—and in part because the safety net the Qing had once provided fell apart. But beginning in the 1950s and—after the setbacks of the Great Leap Forward—especially in the 1960s, things turned around very impressively.

Much of that turnaround, however, relied on very widespread use of deep wells, employing gasoline or electrical power to bring up underground water from unprecedented depths.⁴ Large-scale exploitation of China's northern groundwater began in the 1960s and peaked in the 1970s, at roughly ten times the annual extraction rates that prevailed during 1949–61; it has remained steady since about 1980 at roughly four times the 1949–61 level.⁵ But this amount of water withdrawal is unsustainable. The North China water table has been dropping by roughly 4–6 feet per year for quite some time now, and by over 10 feet per year in many places; if this rate of extraction is maintained, the aquifers beneath the plain will be completely gone in 30–40 years, according to

⁴ For one of many accounts of the tubewell revolution in North China see Charles Greer, *Water Management in the Yellow River Basin of China*, Austin, TX 1979, pp. 153–60. Greer notes that, as far back as 1959, Soviet engineers had seen a vast increase in groundwater exploitation as the only alternative to diverting southern waters to the north.

⁵ Eloise Kendy, Tammo Steenhuis and David Molden, 'Combining Urban and Rural Water Use for a Sustainable North China Plain', First International Yellow River Forum on River Basin Management, Zhengzhou, 12–15 May 2003.

some estimates.⁶ This is by no means a unique situation. In the United States, for instance, the Ogallala Aquifer—which lies beneath portions of western South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas, and eastern Wyoming, Colorado and New Mexico—is being depleted at roughly the same rate. Serious excess withdrawals began there in the 1950s, and as in China, turned areas previously marginal for farming—the land of the 1930s Dust Bowl—into a bread-basket. But while the 175,000 square miles served by the Ogallala Aquifer are home to less than 2 million people, the 125,000 square miles of the North China Plain are home to over 214 million, 80 per cent of them rural.⁷ The 2008 North China drought—the worst since the late 1950s drought that exacerbated the Great Leap famines—focused global attention on the problem for a brief moment, but chronic water shortages, both in cities and in the countryside, have been a fact of life for years, and conflicts over scarce or polluted water have become common events.⁸ So, what is to be done?

Efficiency?

One hears periodically about inefficient water use in the cities: the Chinese steel industry, for instance, consumes about twice as much water per ton produced as steel-makers in the most technologically advanced countries (though the Indian steel industry is considerably worse than China's on this score).⁹ Leaky pipes and other infrastructure

⁶ Jim Yardley, Jake Hooker and Huang Yuanxi, 'Choking on Growth: Water and China's Future', *New York Times*, 28 September 2007.

⁷ Figures for the comparison come from: *China News Digest*, 21 May 1998; Eloise Kendy, David Molden, Tammo Steenhuis, Liu Changming and Wang Jinxia, *Policies Drain the North China Plain: Agricultural Policy and Groundwater Depletion in Luancheng County, 1949–2000*, International Water Management Institute, 2003. For the Ogallala Aquifer, see: Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water*, New York 1993, pp. 435–55; Manjula Guru and James Horne, *The Ogallala Aquifer*, US Geological Survey, National Water-Quality Assessment Program, 2000, pp. 1–12; US Geological Survey, *High Plains Regional Groundwater Study*, 2007.

⁸ A figure of 51,000 pollution-related 'incidents' for 2005 alone is cited in 'Zhongguo shui wuran diaocha: bushi tianzai ershi renhuo', 15 August 2007, available at house.sina.com.

⁹ For Chinese figures, see Shao QiuJun and Zhang Qun, 'Evaluation on Sustainable Development of China's Iron and Steel Industry', 2008 *International Symposium on Information Processing*, p. 701; for an idea of Indian practices see Manipadma Jena, 'Steel City Tackles its Water Woes', Infochange India website, October 2004.

problems create considerable waste. But relatively speaking, industrial and urban residential losses are small potatoes; agriculture still uses at least 65 per cent of all water in China—though less, even in absolute terms, than 20 years ago—and has far worse efficiency rates.¹⁰ The cities are certainly not the site of the greatest wastage in commercial terms: according to one estimate, a gallon of water sent from the countryside to Tianjin yields 60 times as much income in its new urban locale as it did in the countryside.¹¹ The best hope of moderating overall water demand is probably to keep per capita urban use from growing too much, and improve use-efficiency, even as the urban population expands. Certainly price increases—unless they are intolerably large—are unlikely to cause city dwellers to cut back much. Any significant reductions will have to come from the countryside. That process has begun, but it is unclear how far it can go without devastating social consequences.

A great deal of water is wasted in agriculture, in part because costs to farmers are kept artificially low; besides, since most rural communities have no way to market water to those who would pay more for it, 'waste' has very little short-run opportunity cost for them.¹² But it is worth noting here that 'waste' has different meanings depending on what time-frame one adopts. Irrigation water that does not reach the plants' roots, but seeps back into the soil, is wasted in the short term—it cannot be used for anything else that year; but in the long term, it can help recharge the local aquifer. On the other hand, polluted water that could be recycled if treated properly, but instead flows out to sea untreated, is 'waste' in both senses and thus represents a bigger problem. Chinese agriculture is not necessarily more wasteful with irrigation water than that of many other countries—and the deviations from market prices are no greater than in the supposedly market-driven United States—but its limited supplies make waste a much more pressing problem.

¹⁰ Li Zijun, 'China Issues New Regulation on Water Management, Sets Fees for Usage', *WorldWatch* Institute, 14 March 2006. Elvin, 'Water in China', p. 113, citing 1990s data, suggests that between 84 and 88 per cent of water is used in agriculture. If we put these sources together, agricultural water use seems to have fallen almost 20 per cent since the late 1980s, without a decline in yields.

¹¹ Sandra Postel, 'China's Unquenchable Thirst', *World Watch*, vol. 20, issue 6, Nov–Dec 2007. Lower figures have been suggested, but none go below 20 times more income.

¹² If they could, they would almost certainly find ready buyers and thus ease urban shortages; but as we will see in examples from India, the results can exacerbate problems of unsustainable water withdrawal.

Technologies that would reduce water waste do exist, but many are so costly that farmers are unlikely to adopt them unless they are subsidized. Centre-pivot irrigation systems, for instance, can save a lot of water, but at roughly \$35,000 each—almost 60 years' income for an average north China farmer—they make sense only for the largest farms; they are also poorly suited to the geometry of existing fields, and to the requirements of rice and some other crops. Drip irrigation, sometimes called micro-irrigation, is another technological fix that has been greeted enthusiastically by many analysts despite being relatively expensive. The idea is that water is moved through small plastic tubes directly to the plants' roots, so that much less of it is wasted; it has been a huge success in Israel, where it was first developed, and in various other water-scarce environments.

More recently, however, doubts have been raised about its benefits, in large part because of the ambiguity of 'waste' mentioned above. Since drip irrigation makes sure that a higher percentage of the water gets to the plants' roots, it will enable a fixed water source—for instance, an above-ground tank catching winter rains for use in the spring—to irrigate more crops than if the water were distributed through traditional ditches or less precisely targeted sprinklers. Alternatively, one could irrigate the same size of crop, and have some water to sell to other users. But where the water source is an underground aquifer, which can be overdrawn and permanently depleted, the benefits become less clear. In that situation, much of the water that seeps away through the bottom of ditches helps replenish the aquifer and is not necessarily 'wasted' from a long-term perspective. On the other hand, precisely because drip irrigation means that almost every gallon of water a farmer buys will help the crops in the current year, it is a 'better buy' for him than water run through a less 'efficient' system; he is therefore tempted to buy more of it.

Thus, drip irrigation may be good for maximizing immediate food output, while actually exacerbating longer-run water shortages in places like northern China—or, as we shall see, much of northern India and Pakistan—where overuse of groundwater is a big problem. This possibility is not merely a theoretical one; a recent study of drip irrigation in the Upper Rio Grande Valley, on both sides of the US–Mexico border, came to the conclusion that it increased water use in precisely this way.³ In short, selectively implemented high-tech solutions may help in some ways, but

³ Frank Ward and Manuel Pulido-Velazquez, 'Water Conservation in Irrigation can Increase Water Use', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 105, no. 47, 25 November 2008.

they cannot provide a total answer to China's problems—even if all the funding for them could be found.

Ironically, low-tech water-efficiency solutions may have greater potential. It is almost impossible to get a clear sense of how much water could be saved by simple measures such as re-lining or covering irrigation ditches, fixing leaky pipes, and so on. The amounts are probably very big, given the low quality of much of the water infrastructure in China and elsewhere. But these measures also cost money; most farmers or rural communities are unlikely to invest in them without subsidies or greater incentives. More effective pollution control—some, though not all, of which is possible with fairly simple and relatively inexpensive technologies—could also help enormously; but here, too, there are serious incentive problems. Local officials generally have more to gain by protecting local factories and jobs than by conserving water, especially, of course, the water of people downstream.

More commercial pricing of irrigation water would help provide such incentives—but here there are serious social and political constraints. More expensive water would almost certainly mean decreased agricultural output. Of course, China has enough foreign currency to buy food abroad, but the government is reluctant to become more dependent on imports. Dearer water might be particularly bad for the many farmers who have been switching from grain production to fruit and vegetables—crops that it otherwise makes sense for China to produce more of, since they demand much more labour per acre than grain, and can produce relatively high incomes for people with small plots. And even if Beijing, and the rest of the world, were content to see Chinese demand for imported food rise significantly, there is the question of what would become of the farmers themselves in such a scenario. Their incomes already lag far behind those of other Chinese workers. Any significant rise in water prices would probably drive millions of marginal farmers to the wall, and greatly accelerate the already rapid rush of people to the cities. Consequently, further water savings in agriculture, though vital, potentially huge, and far less environmentally risky than large water-moving projects, are likely to come slowly and painfully.

Transfers

Under the circumstances, many officials see no alternative to technologically ambitious mega-projects: above all, the South-to-North Water

Transfer Project. The idea behind this \$65 billion plan—tossed around for decades before being officially green-lighted in 2001—is simple: to take water from the Yangzi and its tributaries and move it to North China, where water is much more scarce. But implementing the scheme is extraordinarily difficult, and the consequences of any one of several possible failures could be enormous.¹⁴ If completed, the Transfer will be the largest construction project on earth. It would carry almost 45 billion cubic metres of water per year—roughly the average annual flow of the Yellow River.¹⁵ It has three parts:

- 1) An Eastern Route Scheme, which would take water from the Lower Yangzi in Jiangsu province up to Tianjin, roughly following the route of the Ming-Qing Grand Canal, and, via a branch line, to the Shandong peninsula. This is technologically the simplest part of the project—though it still raises plenty of questions. Parts of it began operation in 2008; it is scheduled to be completed in 2010.
- 2) A Middle Route Scheme, running from near the Three Gorges Dam in Sichuan to Beijing. Work on this route has recently been suspended in response to environmental problems, which have proved to be more complicated than was originally foreseen, and to resistance to relocation by people in the path of the project. (There were large protests in March 2009 near Danjiangkou in Hubei, where over 300,000 people are scheduled to be moved.¹⁶) Still, the official projection is that water will be reaching Beijing through this route by 2014.
- 3) A Western Route Scheme that is really two routes, taking water from the Yalong Zangbo (Yarlung Tsangpo), Dadu, Tongtian and Jinsha Rivers—all of which flow into the Yangzi—across

¹⁴ A good description of the project in English is Liu Changming, 'Environmental Issues and the South-North Water Transfer Scheme', *China Quarterly* 156, December 1998, pp. 900–4. See also McCormack, 'Water Margins', pp. 19–20; US Embassy in China, 'South-North Water Transfer Ready to Start Work', pp. 1–2; Nickum, 'Status of the South-to-North Water Transfer'.

¹⁵ 'South-to-North Water Transfer Project', Ministry of Water Resources website.

¹⁶ See Chris Buckley, 'China's Giant Water Scheme Creates Torrent of Discontent', *Reuters*, 27 February 2009; Michael Bristow, 'Delays Block China's Giant Water Scheme', *BBC News*, 8 February 2009; Shai Oster, 'Water Project in China Is Delayed', *Wall Street Journal*, 31 December 2008.

mountains and the Tibetan plateau, and directing it into the Yellow River, which would then carry it across North China. This is by far the most complex part of the project; work is currently scheduled to begin in 2010, but it would not be completed until 2050.

The Transfer carries uncertainties commensurate with its size and cost. Among other things, there is considerable uncertainty about how dirty the southern waters will be by the time they arrive in the north. Diversions on this scale change flow speeds, sedimentation rates and other important qualities in unpredictable ways, and the original plans have already been modified to add more treatment facilities than were originally thought necessary. Changes in water volume will also affect the ability of other rivers to scour their own beds—effects on the Han River, one of the Yangzi's largest tributaries, are a particular concern. Conveyance canals passing through poorly drained areas may also raise the water table, add excess salts to the soil—already a common problem in irrigated areas of North China—and increase salt-water intrusion rates in the Yangzi Delta.⁷ For better or worse, we will begin learning about the effects of the Eastern Route soon, and probably about the Middle Route in just a few years.

But despite its long time horizon, it is the Western Route—along with other projects in China's far west—which is the big story. First of all, it offers the most dramatic potential rewards. The idea is that it will tap the enormous water resources of China's far southwest—Tibet alone has over 30 per cent of the PRC's fresh-water supply, most of it coming from the annual snow and glacier melts in the Himalayas. These water resources are an aspect of the Tibet question one rarely hears about, but the many engineers in the CCP leadership, including Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, are very aware of it. Chinese citizens are increasingly conscious of it, too—advertisements for bottled Tibetan water now adorn the backs of train seats and other sites, offering an icon of primitive purity of a type long familiar to Western consumers. Hydro projects in this mountainous region can offer enormous yields in electricity, as well as in water supply. The amount of power that water can generate is directly proportional to how far it falls into the turbines: the Yangzi completes 90 per cent of its drop to sea level before it even enters China proper, and the Yellow River 80 per cent of its descent before it leaves

⁷ Liu, 'South-North Water Transfer Scheme', p. 905.

Inner Mongolia.¹⁸ In April 2009, the Chinese government announced plans for twenty additional hydro projects on the upper Yangzi and its tributaries; if completed, these would theoretically increase the already existing hydro-power capacity on the river, which includes the Three Gorges Dam, by 66 per cent.¹⁹

Yet the Western Route also poses by far the biggest complications—and not simply because the engineering challenges are the most complex and the solutions most untested. It is here, and in nearby Yunnan, that the needs of agrarian and industrial China collide most directly with the lives of Tibetans, Yi, Miao and other minority groups. It is here that the environmental risks of dam-building become major *international* issues, with enormous implications for the Mekong, Salween, Brahmaputra and other rivers upon which hundreds of millions of people in the Subcontinent and Southeast Asia rely. And it is here that major water projects—which always include many uncertainties—collide with what has always been an extraordinarily fragile environment, and one which now faces far more than the average amount of extra uncertainty from climate change. Tibet, home to by far the largest glaciers outside the two polar regions, is expected to warm at twice the average global rate during the 21st century.²⁰

Dam-building in Tibet

Although the PRC built plenty of dams between the 1950s and the mid-1980s, relatively few of them were in the far west. This may seem surprising given the concentration of hydro potential in that region, but makes sense in other terms. The need to maximize energy production was less urgently felt before the boom of the 1990s, and there was much less concern about relying on coal, which still provides 80 per cent of China's electricity.²¹ Many of the dams were constructed

¹⁸ On the Yangzi, see Tao Jingliang, 'Features of the Three Gorges Reservoir', in Joseph Witney and Shiu-hung Luk, eds, *Mega-Project: A Case Study of China's Three Gorges Project*, Armonk, NY 1993, p. 68; Lyman Van Slyke, *Yangtze: Nature, History and the River*, Reading, MA 1988, p. 15. On the Yellow River, see *Huanghe shuili shi shuyao*, Beijing 1982, pp. 4–7.

¹⁹ Calculated from figures gathered in Li Jing, 'Yangtze hydro projects to get a boost', *China Daily*, 21 April 2009.

²⁰ Timothy Gardner, 'Tibetan Glacial Shrink to Cut Water Supply by 2050', *Reuters*, 6 January 2009.

²¹ Keith Bradsher, 'China Outpaces US in Cleaner Coal-Fired Plants', *New York Times*, 10 May 2009.

by mobilizing large amounts of labour—especially off-season peasant labour—in place of scarce capital: it was a lot easier to deploy those workers close to home than to send them far away. The supporting infrastructure—roads, for example—and technology for dam-building in remote mountain locations were not available; the far reaches of the upper Yangzi were not even surveyed until the late 1970s. The central government was also more ambivalent about rapid development in the far west than it is today; leaders tended towards more paternalistic policies, avoiding radical cultural change, as offering the best formula for political stability there.

But in the last two decades all this has changed, leading to a sharp shift towards huge dam-building projects in Yunnan and, above all, Tibet. The technical capacities and supporting infrastructure needed for capital-intensive projects in these areas are now available. The pressure to increase domestic supplies of both energy and water has become intense. In addition, the regime has clearly decided that raising incomes in the far west is the best way to keep control and make use of those territories—even if the wrenching cultural changes, massive Han immigration and severe inequalities accompanying this development increase conflict in the short to medium term. For better or worse, the kind of paternalism previously apparent in western frontier policy—dating back to at least the Qing, though it has been gradually weakening for a long time—is now being decisively abandoned. Meanwhile, changes in the relationships between central government, provincial governments and private investors have helped create enormous opportunities to gain both power and profit through accelerated dam-building.

Plans to ‘send western electricity east’, with a particular focus on developing Yunnan hydro-power for booming Guangdong, date back to the 1980s; seasonal deliveries of power first arrived in 1993. From 2001, Guangdong officials began concluding deals for regular annual power purchases with the authorities in Yunnan. At the same time, officials in Beijing began vetoing plans for additional coal-fired power plants in Guangdong, which made hydro-power an absolute necessity for the rapidly growing Pearl River Delta.²² It is not clear, at least not to me,

²² Darrin Magee, ‘Powershed Politics: Yunnan Hydropower under Great Western Development’, *China Quarterly* 185, March 2006, pp. 25–6; Grainne Ryder, ‘Skyscraper Dams in Yunnan’, *Probe International*, 12 May 2006, p. 3.

exactly what the relationship is between provincial and central government power in this story. One can see wealthy Guangdong reaching out to secure its own energy supplies here; but complaints from Guangdong about Beijing preventing the construction of power plants in the province, and about power shortages when sufficient hydro-power failed to come online on time, suggest that new inter-provincial agreements may often be shotgun weddings imposed by the centre, for whom the opportunity to create these configurations offers a means of both maintaining leverage over coastal boom areas and of integrating peripheral regions more deeply into the Beijing vision of a national political economy.

More generally, what has been called the 'corporatizing' of the Chinese electrical power industry has created complex webs of public and private actors with strong interests in southwestern hydro development.³⁵ In 2002 the government-owned State Power Corporation of China was broken into five corporations, each with exclusive development rights over particular watersheds (a sixth, connected to the Three Gorges, is directly under the State Council). These corporations are state-owned, but have created partly-owned subsidiaries which can sell shares to private investors on the Shanghai, Hong Kong and New York stock exchanges, thus raising capital while retaining control. For investors, meanwhile, power-generation stocks provide a way to bet on the Chinese economy in general, without needing accurate information on the prospects for any particular manufacturers. These subsidiaries, in turn, have combined with other subsidiaries of the big five, or with companies established by provincial governments, to set up still other firms that undertake particular projects.

While this system allows dam-builders to take advantage of private capital markets and corporate organization, their links to the state remain crucial. Huaneng Power Group, which holds development rights for the Lancang/Upper Mekong, was until recently headed by Li Xiaopeng, son of former Premier Li Peng, a chief advocate of the Three Gorges project. (The younger Li, who like so many other Chinese leaders has a background

³⁵ Magee, 'Powershed Politics', p. 35. For a useful timeline of China's electrical power reforms, see the working paper by John Dore and Yu Xiaogang, 'Yunnan Hydropower Expansion', Unit for Social and Environmental Research, Chiang Mai University, March 2004, p. 13.

in engineering, has now moved on to become Deputy Governor of Shanxi, with responsibility for industry and coal mining.²⁴) In setting up a subsidiary, the parent company will often endow it with important assets—generators, transmission lines, development rights—in return for a large stake in the new business; since well-developed markets for these assets rarely exist, and the state-owned parent company does not face the same pressures to be profitable as the subsidiary, the prices at which they are transferred can easily be manipulated to lower the costs (and increase the profits) for the subsidiary and its investors. And since all these firms continue to do business with each other—sending power over another company's lines, for instance—there are many opportunities to transfer costs back and forth between entities that need to show a profit and those that do not, or which are less favoured by powerful actors.²⁵ Government connections also make it easier for these companies to avoid acknowledging—much less bearing—the full social and environmental costs of their work.

Last but not least, the large and sometimes unpredictable fluctuations in water volumes far upstream mean that the turbines will not always be fully utilized, so that the actual amount of power generated may be much less impressive than the enormous figures for 'installed capacity' listed for these projects; uncertainties which holders of development rights seeking either investment partners or permission to build have no incentive to highlight.²⁶ This does not mean, of course, that dams—including large ones—may not make economic and even environmental sense in some cases, given China's limited options. It does mean, however, that in a number of instances dams are almost certainly being built for political motives, or as a result of profit-seeking by those with government connections, where even a narrowly economic analysis would not justify them.

²⁴ Yang Lifei, 'Li Xiaopeng Named Deputy Governor of Shanxi', *Shanghai Daily*, 12 June 2008; Xinhua Economic News Service, 'Li Xiaopeng Appointed Vice Governor of Shanxi Province', 12 June 2008.

²⁵ Grainne Ryder raises doubts about the economic rationality of Three Gorges and various Yunnan hydro projects on this basis. see 'Skyscraper Dams', pp. 5–6, and 'China's New Dam-Builders and the Emerging Regulatory Framework for Competitive Power Market', draft paper presented on the Mekong Programme on Water Environment and Resilience website, 6–7 July 2006.

²⁶ Mark Elvin concludes that 'in engineering terms, the better opportunities for hydro-electric power have already been used up': 'Water in China', p. 125.

Even the water-engineering projects that will genuinely help millions in northern and eastern China—and perhaps others, if they serve to curb the country's carbon emissions and future food imports—have serious implications for people who live in the regions where they will be built. Tibetans and other ethnic minorities in the far southwest are likely to be the most affected. In May 2009, an unconfirmed report by the Tibetan government-in-exile stated that at least six Tibetan women were injured when security forces opened fire on them as they protested against a hydro project on the Tibet–Sichuan border.⁷⁷ One issue here is that of human tampering with lakes and rivers that Tibetans hold sacred, such as the large dam at Yamdrok Tso.⁷⁸ A massive dam—40,000 megawatts, or almost twice the capacity of Three Gorges—proposed at the great bend in the Yalong Zangbo would again wreak a dramatic transformation on a holy site, in order to create power and water supplies that would mostly go to far-away Han Chinese.

Meanwhile, the project poses serious risks for the traditional livelihoods of many people. Road-building and railway-building—particularly the Qinghai–Tibet highway and the railroad that runs near it, completed in 2006—seem to have substantially degraded the permafrost layer in adjacent areas; the permafrost, in turn, protects a series of underground lakes, so that damaging it is likely to exacerbate an already worrisome drying trend in the region. A Chinese surveying team recently reported that some of the sources of the Yangzi itself are drying up, and the area is turning to desert. Wetlands and grasslands that are important to the large numbers of livestock herders in Tibet have already shrunk quite significantly; this is likely to accelerate the process. Existing dams in Yunnan appear to be interfering with local fisheries, and new ones pose significant threats to China's greatest concentration of biodiversity.⁷⁹ Since much of

⁷⁷ '6 Tibetans Seriously Wounded in Protests Against China's Hydro-Electric Dam Project', Central Tibet Administration website, 26 May 2009.

⁷⁸ On Yamdrok Tso, see *Death of a Sacred Lake*, London 1996, produced by the Free Tibet Campaign (UK).

⁷⁹ 'Permafrost Soil in Yangtze River Area Disappearing', Xinhua News Agency, 13 February 2009; for the Chinese survey see Yang Jibin, 'Changjiang zai zheli shizong le', *Nanfang zhoubao*, 18 February 2009, available on the infzm.com website. The desertification of the wetlands is the subject of an informative video on the Asia Society website: 'Origins of Rivers: Omens of a Crisis'. A recent UN report refers to the area as 'one of the most biodiverse and least disturbed temperate ecosystems in the world', while noting plans to build 28 dams nearby. World Conservation Monitoring Centre, 'Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan Protected Areas', pp. 1, 4–6.

this region is seismically active, the risk of an earthquake precipitating a catastrophic dam failure and sudden floods cannot be dismissed.

South of the mountains

Hundreds of millions of people further downstream also depend on rivers that start in the Himalayas, of course. States to China's south that also have ambitious plans to harness their waters are worried that Chinese initiatives may preempt their own current or future usage. The massive hydroelectric dam and water-diversion scheme on the great bend of the Yalong Zangbo River is a case in point. The 40,000 megawatt hydro project is itself a huge issue. But what matters more for people south of the Himalayas is that the plan not only calls for impounding huge amounts of water behind the dam, but for changing the direction in which the water flows beyond it—so that it would eventually feed into the South-to-North Transfer project. That water currently flows south into Assam to help form the Brahmaputra, which in turn joins the Ganges to form the world's largest river delta, supplying much of the water to a basin with over 300 million inhabitants. While India and Bangladesh have worried for some time that China might divert this river, Beijing has repeatedly denied any such intentions. But rumours persist that a diversion project is in fact underway, and Indian premier Manmohan Singh is said to have raised the question of river boundaries in his January 2008 visit to Beijing. The latest Chinese denial was issued by former water minister Wang Shucheng this May.³⁰

In 1999, Wen Jiabao, then Vice-Premier, told a meeting of Chinese scientist and engineers that water scarcity threatened the 'very survival of the Chinese nation'. Water is indeed a matter of survival, but not just for China. Most of Asia's major rivers—the Yellow, the Yangzi, the Mekong, Salween, Irrawaddy, Brahmaputra, Ganges, Sutlej and Indus—draw on the glaciers and snowmelt of the Himalayas, and all of these except the Ganges have their source on the Chinese side of the border, in Tibet. In many cases, no international agreements exist for sharing these waters, or even exchanging data about them. There are urgent water problems

³⁰ See respectively 'Plan to Open Two More Trade Points with China', *Hindustan Times*, 21 November 2006; 'India Quakes over China's Water Plan', *Asia Times Online*, 9 December 2008; 'China won't divert world's highest river to thirsty north', Xinhua News Service, 25 May 2009. Unconfirmed reports from 2000 suggested that Beijing had already decided to go ahead, but not until 2009, when the Three Gorges project would be finished: McCormack, 'Water Margins', p. 18.

throughout South and Southeast Asia, but their nature varies as one travels from west to east. Pakistan and much of northern India face grave shortages of water for agriculture and daily domestic use, as well as poor provision of rural power. For many people the latter problem intensifies the former, as it makes the operation of deep wells increasingly impractical; but in the longer run, easing the power deficit without solving the water-supply crisis will just intensify future shortages. By contrast, in most of Southeast Asia there is plenty of water, for now; but electricity is in short supply, and plans to alleviate that problem through hydro-power threaten delicate riverine ecosystems.

Pakistan may be more dependent on irrigation than any large nation on earth. Over half of the country receives less than 8 inches of rainfall per year; by way of comparison, Phoenix averages 8.4 inches; only 8 per cent of Pakistan gets over 20 inches—the amount that falls in Tel Aviv. Yet the country is predominantly agricultural, and almost 80 per cent of its farming requires irrigation. As recently as 1990, irrigation accounted for a stunning 96 per cent of water use. As much of the groundwater is brackish or badly polluted, people often rely on diversions from irrigation canals to get water for their daily needs.³¹ Agriculture remains central to the economy, and there are even plans, backed by foreign investors, for a sharp increase in grain exports, mostly to the Middle East.³² Efforts to improve irrigation efficiency are underway, but the government is also looking for ways to engineer large increases in supply.

Northern and northwestern India are not quite as dry as Pakistan, but nonetheless have millions of farmers, several arid regions and highly irregular, often inadequate rains. For India as a whole, the per capita water supply is about a quarter of the global average, as for China. Moreover, half the annual rainfall comes in 15 days, and 90 per cent of total river flow comes during four months. Yet India has built only a fifth of the water-storage capacity per capita that China has, and about 4 per cent of that of the US or Australia. Canals for surface irrigation were built in some areas under the British, and on a considerably larger scale after Independence; but many have been poorly maintained or only serve those with political influence. In northern and northwestern India, probably even more than in northern China, well-digging has been

³¹ For these data, see P. K. Jensen, W. Van Der Hoek, F. Konradsen and W. A. Jehangir, 'Domestic Use of Irrigation Water in Punjab', WEDC Conference, Islamabad 1998.

³² Shripad Dharmadhikary, *Mountains of Concrete: Dam Building in the Himalayas*, Berkeley 2008, p. 8

essential to enable farmers to survive. It has also underlain the 'green revolution' which has raised agricultural production enough to keep up with the enormous population growth of the last half-century; the high-yielding hybrid wheat, rice and cotton seeds on which this was based all requiring more water than older varieties. Groundwater now provides 70 per cent of India's irrigation needs, and close to 80 per cent of water for domestic use.³³

This aggressive exploitation of groundwater is unsustainable. Well water is free to any farmer who can reach it by digging down on his land; the electricity to run the pumps is heavily subsidized, straining the budgets of many Indian states.³⁴ Even at low prices, however, energy costs have become a huge burden for many small farmers, as water levels drop and pumps must work harder; moreover, irregular electricity supplies, with frequent spikes and interruptions, can often ruin pumps, wreaking sudden devastation on unlucky farmers. The large inequalities in landholding within many Indian villages—much more pronounced than in rural China—are a further complication. Richer farmers have every reason to drill deeper wells, take more water from aquifers, and resell whatever they do not use themselves at high mark-ups to people without wells, for domestic use; indeed, this is often more profitable than using the water to raise crops. Other farmers then also need to dig deeper, in response; as a result a tube-well race has developed, depleting aquifers even faster. Suicides of farmers who cannot get enough water to continue planting have become common in recent years, including instances of protest by mass suicide.³⁵ Some of these protests have been

³³ For water supply see G. Karakunan Pillai, 'Interlinking of Rivers in India: Objectives and Plans', in Anil Kumar Thakur and Pushpa Kumari, eds, *Interlinking of Rivers in India: Costs and Benefits*, New Delhi 2007, p. 3; in the same collection, Shashi Bala Jain, 'Interlinking of Indian Rivers: A Viewpoint', p. 24. For irrigation see John Briscoe, *India's Water Economy: Bracing for a Turbulent Future*, World Bank draft report, 2005, pp. 4, 14–23, 41–5. Briscoe emphasizes that better maintenance and operation of existing facilities is now a more urgent need than further construction, but that the required shift in resources has not occurred.

³⁴ Briscoe, *India's Water Economy*, pp. 23–4, gives figures relative to the fiscal deficits of various Indian states. Daniel Pepper, 'India's Water Shortage', *Fortune*, 24 January 2008, puts the cost to the electrical power industry of subsidizing farmers at \$9 billion per year.

³⁵ Sean Daily, 'Mass Farmer Suicide Sobering Reminder of Consequences of Water Shortages', *Belfast Telegraph*, 15 April 2009. The story refers to a recent mass suicide of 1,500 farmers, and an estimate that 200,000 farmers have committed suicide (presumably not all as a protest gesture) over a period of 12 years.

aimed at state governments that have raised electricity prices too high for many farmers to manage, although the rates are still far below those charged to city dwellers. Some are also aimed at corporate users and polluters of water—Coca-Cola has been a popular target.³⁶

There is also increasing concern that water scarcity and pollution could create dangerous shortfalls in agricultural output, especially in the Indian state of Punjab—which produces the country's largest agricultural surpluses, including roughly half the wheat and rice procured by the central authorities to stabilize prices—and in neighbouring Pakistan.³⁷ The pollution, bad enough to cause large increases in birth defects and cancer, has many sources, including the legacy of years of intensive irrigation, fertilization and pesticide use. Salination and water-logging, which also increases the incidence of malaria, have been mounting problems in the Punjab since the introduction of year-round irrigation by the British at the end of the 19th century.³⁸ It is estimated that in East Punjab today, 50 per cent of groundwater is recycled water from irrigation canals; in West Punjab, 80 per cent. Near Karachi, where it reaches the sea, the Indus now often fills only a small fraction of its bed; fishing has disappeared, an invasion of sea-water is harming agriculture, and water for domestic use is desperately short.³⁹

This crisis has been met with a proliferation of plans for new water projects. Though people are well aware that the unintended consequences of past projects have played a role in creating current difficulties, the prospect of losing the gains in agricultural output achieved through irrigation is terrifying, and possibilities for alleviating serious electricity shortages—

³⁶ See, for instance, Georgina Drew, 'From the Groundwater Up: Asserting Water Rights in India', *Development* 51, 2008, pp. 37–41. Coca-Cola's defenders note that they pay a higher rate for the electricity with which they bring up water than do farmers; nonetheless, they are able to afford larger amounts of it, which lowers the water table and leaves less for farmers. Waste products from Coca-Cola plants have also been a source of controversy.

³⁷ See Government of Punjab Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Department website; Dharmadhikary, *Mountains of Concrete*, pp. 8–9.

³⁸ Indu Agnihotri, 'Ecology, Land Use and Colonization: The Canal Colonies of Punjab', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 33, no. 1, 1996, pp. 48–55; Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, London 2001, pp. 332–5 points to a number of problems with British irrigation projects in India (not just Punjab) that began appearing even in the late 19th century.

³⁹ Briscoe, *India's Water*, p. 22; 'Pakistan's Water Crisis', *PRI's The World*, 13 April 2009. Where the river used to be 5 km wide near Karachi, it is now only 200 metres.

which, among other things, inhibit manufacturing growth that could reduce reliance on agriculture—seem very tempting. And while many plans are driven by real needs, China is hardly the only country where political and economic interests create incentives to build mega-projects that are incomprehensible in terms of costs and benefits. In India, for instance, the central government's inability to enforce water-sharing agreements among the states has led some upstream states to build extra storage facilities, in order to hang onto water that is at least as badly needed downstream; meanwhile, some downstream states, despite desperate shortages, have balked at implementing water-saving measures that might weaken their claims to a larger allocation from rivers flowing through multiple states. And since only direct human employment of water counts as 'needs' for these allocations, any other uses—e.g. releasing water to help maintain estuarial ecosystems—count as 'waste' that might weaken future claims, and are thus discouraged.⁴⁰ (Water-sharing agreements between India and Pakistan have thus far been more consistently observed than have those among Indian states, despite decades of hostility between these countries.)

Unsurprisingly, the most ambitious new plans are for sites in the highest mountains. Pakistan, India, Bhutan and Nepal are all aiming to build huge dams in the Himalayas. Planned construction over the next decade totals 80,000 megawatts, compared to around 64,000 for the whole of Latin America; India alone plans to add a further 67,000 megawatts in the next decade. Like China, India exploited the hydro-power in its less mountainous areas first, and has only 11,000 megawatts of non-Himalayan potential left. Even excluding China, potential Himalayan capacity is a staggering 192,000 megawatts, almost half of it in India.⁴¹ Meanwhile, India's 2001 census reported that 44 per cent of households had no access to electricity; the figure is about the same in Bhutan and closer to 60 per cent in Nepal. Interest in dam-building is just as intense in Pakistan, though there irrigation is a higher priority than electricity. However, the estimated cost of the projects planned for the next 10 years is roughly \$90 billion, much of which remains unsecured. India has financing for slightly more than

⁴⁰ Briscoe, *India's Water*, pp. 37–8; Anju Kohli, 'Interlinking of Indian Rivers: Inter-State Water Disputes', in Thakur and Kumari, *Interlinking of Rivers in India*, pp. 287–92.

⁴¹ Dharmadhikary, *Mountains of Concrete*, p. 7. The world's installed hydro-electric capacity is currently around 675,000 megawatts: see National Renewable Energy Laboratory, *Power Technologies Energy Data Book*, Golden, CO 2005, p. 51.

half of its planned dam construction through 2012, but much less for needs through 2017. Pakistan has recently turned to Chinese financing and technical expertise for its Diamer Bhasha dam, a \$12.6 billion project which was announced in 2006, but had trouble attracting capital. There has also been some financial support from Middle Eastern sources and various international development banks.⁴³

Meanwhile, other foreign-backed plans will place additional strains on Pakistan's water supply. Investors from various wealthy but arid Middle Eastern states have recently been making large purchases of farmland, both in Pakistan and elsewhere in Asia and Africa. (South Korea and China have also been doing this, though not, as far as I know, in Pakistan.) The Pakistani Minister of Investment, seeking to dispel any fear that local farmers will be displaced, has said that all the 6 million acres up for sale or lease to foreigners—equal to roughly 10 per cent of the country's cultivated acreage—is currently unused.⁴³ If true, this means that any water devoted to it will represent an addition to existing demand. Indeed, a recent story in the *Economist* noted that many of these land deals seem to be aimed above all at the water rights that go with the land; it quotes the chairman of Nestlé referring to them as 'the great water grab'.⁴⁴

Interlinking India's rivers

Since India, like China, is currently mining groundwater to produce grain surpluses in some of its vast dry regions, it may be no surprise that it, too, is contemplating a major scheme for water diversion. The most ambitious part of its Interlinking of Rivers Project, the Himalayan

⁴³ Dharmadhikary, *Mountains of Concrete*, pp. 8–15. For Pakistani funding see also Ann-Kathrin Schneider, 'South Asia's Most Costly Dam Gets an Infusion', *World Rivers Review*, vol. 23, no. 4, December 2008, citing a consortium involving Chinese companies and 'some Arab countries'.

⁴³ Amena Bakr, 'Pakistan offers farmland to foreign investors', *Reuters*, 20 April 2009, and 'Pakistan Opens More Farmland to Foreigners', *Maktoob*, 17 May 2009. Pakistan had over 56 million acres under cultivation in 1997.

⁴⁴ 'Buying farmland abroad: Outsourcing's third wave', *Economist*, 23–29 May 2009. The International Food Policy Research Institute tracks these transactions, while noting that many appear to be kept secret: Joachim von Braun and Ruth Meinzen-Dick, 'Land Grabbing' by Foreign Investors in Developing Countries', available on IFPRI website, April 2009. Chinese purchases seem to be predominantly in Africa, and mostly with an eye to biofuel production.

section, would move water from the upper parts of the Ganges, Yamuna and Brahmaputra Rivers westward, ending in the Luni and Sabarmati Rivers in Rajasthan and Gujarat; Haryana and Punjab would also receive some of the water. The project's second—'Peninsular'—section would direct water to dry parts of Orissa and Tamil Nadu. And just as China seems to be retreating from its earlier assurances to India that it had no plans to divert water from the Yalong Zangbo–Brahmaputra, so this project suggests that India is hedging on its more formal promises to Bangladesh—including a written understanding of 1996—that no water would be diverted away from the Ganges above the barrage at Farakka, a few kilometers from the India–Bangladesh border.⁴⁵

Some of the intermediate links would create shipping channels, and the project also aims to reduce seasonal flooding problems on the Yamuna, especially near Delhi. It is also supposed to generate 30,000 megawatts of net hydro-power—that is, power available for other uses after subtracting the energy needed for moving water. The main purpose, however, would be to provide large amounts of additional irrigation water, mostly in western India; official plans claim it could increase the total irrigated area by as much as 35 million hectares.⁴⁶ Official estimates for the cost of the total project, with 260 links between rivers, run at \$120 billion, which would make it even bigger than China's planned river diversions. Based on subsequent comments by members of the task force that drafted the plan, one study has suggested a revised price tag of \$200 billion.⁴⁷

Plans for the project have been shrouded in a degree of secrecy unusual for India—even more so, it appears, than with China's river diversion

⁴⁵ Ramaswamy Iyer, 'River-linking Project: A Critique', in Yonginder Alagh, Ganesh Pangare and Bikaham Gujja, eds, *Interlinking of Rivers in India*, New Delhi 2006, pp. 61–2; A. Muniyam, 'Water Crisis in India: Is Linking of Rivers a Solution?', in Thakur and Kumari, *Interlinking of Rivers: Costs and Benefits*, p. 229; in the same collection, Debotpal Goswami, 'Linking of Major Rivers: the Case for Mighty Brahmaputra', pp. 297–8.

⁴⁶ Narendra Prasad, 'A Bird's Eye View on Interlinking of Rivers in India', in Thakur and Kumari, *Interlinking of Rivers: Costs and Benefits*, p. 19.

⁴⁷ See the map in Jayanta Bandyopadhyay and Shama Perveen, 'A Scrutiny of the Justifications for the Proposed Inter-linking of Rivers in India', in Alagh et al., *Interlinking of Rivers*, p. 30. For cost estimate, see Ashok Khosla's 'Foreword', p. 11, and for estimates of power generation, Iyer, 'River-linking Project', p. 57, in the same collection. See also Narpal Singh Rathore, 'Proposed Plan for Satluj–Ghaggar–Yamuna–Johari–Luni–Sabarmati River Link channels', presented at Map India conference, January 2003.

projects. It is hard to get an estimate of the number of people likely to be displaced, though two scholars put the number as high as 5.5 million.⁴⁸ Parts of the plan that have been revealed have been sharply criticized on a number of grounds, and it is unclear what will end up being built. Aside from posing several technological and ecological questions about specific aspects of the projects, both domestic critics and a World Bank study have noted that the water transfers being contemplated are only politically feasible if enforceable legal agreements can be reached on allocating the waters and compensating the 'donors'; such accords have generally not fared well in India. There is also a widespread consensus that more water conservancy money needs to go into improving maintenance of existing facilities, rather than further construction. One scholar largely supportive of the Interlinking of Rivers Project estimates that net water availability would be increased just as much by a 20 per cent improvement in water-use efficiency (although he points to other benefits, including hydro-power, and favours doing both).⁴⁹ Some opponents, on the other hand, have suggested that the project would so deplete resources for other water-works that the latter might have to be privatized to raise cash, at considerable risk to poorer customers.

Environmental risks

Before considering some of the wider environmental risks associated with these water projects, it is worth noting that in the case of large dams, environmental uncertainties represent considerable financial risks for the dam-builders themselves. Such dams have huge construction costs, but very modest operating expenses once they are finished; thus they *can* become big cash cows once they are generating power—especially if, as seems likely in this part of the world, demand for electricity continues to rise. Profitability is therefore dependent on how long they continue generating power after completion. That period can be cut short by many factors, of which sedimentation may be the most common. Sanmenxia dam on the middle Yellow River, completed in 1962, is a particularly notorious example—not only because it failed quickly and expensively, but because many of the problems had been predicted.

⁴⁸ H. H. Uliveppa and M. N. Siddingappanavar, 'Interlinking of Rivers in India: Problems and Prospects', in Thakur and Kumari, *Interlinking of Rivers: Costs and Benefits*, p. 276.

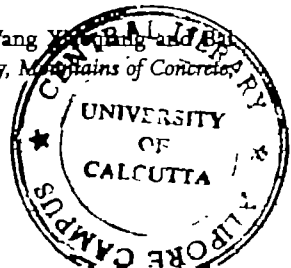
⁴⁹ Krishna Nand Yadav, 'Interlinking of Rivers: Need of the Hour', in Thakur and Kumari, *Interlinking of Rivers: Costs and Benefits*, p. 71.

(The project went ahead anyway, in part it seems because, after the withdrawal of Soviet technical experts, China wanted to prove that it could build such a dam without outside help.⁵⁰) Because interest must be paid on the construction costs, profitability is also affected by how much time elapses before its revenue starts to come on-stream. Mega-projects that take a long time to complete are thus especially vulnerable, economically speaking, to any shortfall in power generation.

Three factors, at least, could make the lives of these new projects shorter than anticipated. First, the Himalayas are comparatively young mountains with high rates of erosion, and their upper reaches have relatively little vegetation to hold soil in place—a situation exacerbated by deforestation in recent decades. This tends to make for high sediment burdens in rivers descending from the Himalayas. A 1986 study found that almost 40 per cent of the small hydro-dams built in Tibet since 1949 had become defunct or unusable by being silted up; similar problems have developed on a number of Pakistani dams, which have lost their capacity for seasonal water storage and irrigation, as well as power generation.⁵¹ Ironically, this loss of storage capacity has become an argument for building more dams. Second, any errors in predicting future river flow can have dramatic effects on the durability of a dam, sharply reducing profitability. Long-run data on flow fluctuation are not available for many of the Himalayan rivers, and the Chinese government has not been very forthcoming about the figures it has assembled. But there are reasons, mostly connected with climate change, to think that the future may be drier than the last few decades, especially in the western Himalayas (though there are also some reasons to believe the opposite). And it becomes exponentially harder to model future river flows when a great many large projects are being planned on the same set of rivers and tributaries. Several analysts of India's Interlinking of Rivers have questioned whether the Brahmaputra basin—a critical water source for this project—can be meaningfully considered to have a water 'surplus' even now; the likelihood (in their view) of a major Chinese diversion

⁵⁰ On Sanmenxia, see Pomeranz, 'The Transformation of China's Environment, 1500–2000', in Edmund T. Burke III and Kenneth Pomeranz, eds, *The Environment and World History 1500–2000*, Berkeley 2009, p. 138.

⁵¹ Free Tibet Campaign, *Death of a Sacred Lake*, p. 7; Wang Yixiang and Bai Nianfeng, *The Poverty of Plenty*, p. 89; and Dharmadhikary, *Mountains of Concrete*, p. 28.



upstream and of glacial retreat due to global warming make the idea that any water is available to be transferred extremely dubious.²³

A World Bank study of India's water future argues that the Himalayas offer one of the world's 'most benign environments' for dam-building. The basis of this estimate is simple: a calculation of people to be displaced and acreage to be submerged per megawatt generated.²⁴ Given the huge power potential in the denominators of these projects and the sparse population of many highland areas, these ratios are not surprising, and they deserve to be taken seriously. But they are by no means a complete measure of the costs and risks involved. Like all dams, those planned for the Indian Himalayas would submerge significant amounts of land, including forests and grazing areas important to a number of the remaining migratory people in the region. Several involve diverting rivers through underground tunnels which would create large dry regions, with serious impacts on local fisheries and farming. Moreover, the Himalayas represent a major—and fragile—concentration of biodiversity. Their rapid rise, from 500 metres to over 8,000 metres, creates a remarkable range of ecosystems within a relatively small space. Conservation International reports that, of an estimated 10,000 plant species in one Himalayan sub-region, over 3,100 are found nowhere else.²⁵ And here, too, as in Tibet and Yunnan, there are significant risks of earthquakes and glacial lake outbreak-floods.

Perhaps most surprising, it is no longer clear that large hydro-dams are even a consistently climate-friendly source of energy. While hydro-electricity can be a substitute for carbon-dioxide producing fossil fuels, the reservoirs behind big dams often include large amounts of rotting vegetable matter and thus are a significant source of methane—a much more potent greenhouse gas. (This is not an issue for 'run of the river' dams, which have no reservoirs; but these make up a very small percentage of big projects.) These methane emissions are larger in tropical and sub-tropical climates, where vegetation both grows and decays faster. A 2007 study suggested that methane from dam reservoirs actually accounted for 19 per cent of India's greenhouse-gas emissions, while hydro-power accounts for only 16 per cent of the country's electricity and

²³ See the essays in Thakur and Kumari, *Interlinking of Rivers: Costs and Benefits*, especially Sharma and Kumari, 'Interlinking of Rivers. Rationale, Benefits, and Costs'.

²⁴ Briscoe, *India's Water*, pp. 45–6.

²⁵ Dharmadhikary, *Mountains of Concrete*, pp. 23–7.

less still of its total energy use.⁵⁵ These figures are still preliminary estimates; methane emissions may be lower than average for dams high in the Himalayas, which is not an area where plant matter grows or decays rapidly; and there may be ways to mitigate these effects, by capturing and burning the methane to generate more power. But they call into question the common assumption that, despite the environmental risks, large dams are a 'greener' energy source than most alternatives; the non-trivial greenhouse emissions involved in creating huge amounts of concrete and steel further complicate the picture.

Indochina

Further east, the plans are not quite as ambitious, but they still portend dramatic changes for millions of people. Those affecting the Salween River—known as the Nu in eastern Tibet and Yunnan—are shrouded in the greatest mystery, since for most of its length it is either in China or Burma, in places forming the Burmese-Thai border; neither regime welcomes publicity. Because the Salween still runs within steep mountain gorges for many miles after crossing into Burma, before dropping quite suddenly just before reaching its delta, there is enormous hydro potential here, and much less domestic demand. To date, the Salween has not been tapped very much for human use; it remains one of the few large free-flowing rivers left in Asia. A major dam on the Chinese side of the border was stopped in 2004 for environmental reasons, and work has recently been suspended again. However, there are now a number of dams planned or underway on the river, both in China—where the maximum programme calls for a 'staircase' of thirteen dams—and in Burma.⁵⁶ The expectation is that the power generated in Burma will be exported to Thailand, Vietnam and perhaps China.

A number of the Burmese projects are being built by Chinese companies and will be operated by them for several years after completion.

⁵⁵ For the emissions, see Ivan Lima, Fernando Ramos, Luis Bambace and Reinaldo Rosa, 'Methane Emissions from Large Dams as Renewable Energy Resources: A Developing Nation Perspective', *Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies for Global Change*, vol. 13, no. 2, February 2008, pp. 200 and 202, table 2.

⁵⁶ Shi Jiangtao, 'Wen Calls Halt to Yunnan Dam Plan', *South China Morning Post*, 21 May 2009, re-published by the International Rivers Network's China Dams List; Dore and Yu, 'Yunnan Hydropower Expansion', p. 14; planned projects on the Jinsha (a Yangzi tributary) and Lancang-Mekong are listed on p. 15.

Many are located in highland areas of Burma's Shan state, where the government has been trying for many years to gain fuller control over ethnic-minority populations. Activists have charged that the regime is taking advantage of the dam-building to further its political and military aims in the area by relocating the inhabitants.⁵⁷ Another planned dam would be built in what is essentially a war zone in the Karen minority region near the Burmese–Thai border. Much of the area is officially a wild-life sanctuary, but it has been heavily logged in recent years, particularly after Thailand banned logging on its side of the border; roads are now being built through it to facilitate dam construction—and state control.⁵⁸ Given the difficulty of visiting these areas, and the absence of information on which projects are at what stage, it is hard to guess at their likely social and environmental impact. And since the Salween watershed, with around 7 million people, is far less populated than the Mekong to its east, with around 70 million—not to mention the Ganges–Brahmaputra to the west, or the major Chinese rivers to the north—it has not had as much attention. Nonetheless, it raises the full range of complex issues and trade-offs, with fears about endangered species, fisheries and other resources upon which local people rely, forced relocations—and, according to some, forced labour—on one side, and pressures for development in an exceptionally poor country on the other.

The larger and more densely populated Mekong basin raises all these issues and more. Here both physical and political geography create an important divide more or less at the Chinese border. For one thing, the vast majority of the river's hydro-power potential is on the Chinese side. The river starts 5,500 metres up on the Tibet–Qinghai plateau, and is down to 500 metres above sea level when it leaves China. Its hydro potential within Yunnan alone almost equals its potential in Burma, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam combined—though the latter is far from trivial—despite the fact that Yunnan accounts for just a third of the river's descent within China.⁵⁹ Thus far, China has completed three

⁵⁷ Milton Osborne, 'The Water Politics of China and Southeast Asia II: Rivers, Dams, Cargo Boats and the Environment', Lowy Institute, May 2007, pp. 4, 10–11. See also Shan Herald Agency for News, 'Activists Protest Tasang Dam', 26 October 2003. The Shan themselves are mostly lowland agriculturalists, but the Shan territory includes many other peoples.

⁵⁸ Karen Environmental and Social Action Network, *Khoe Kay: Biodiversity in Peril*, July 2008.

⁵⁹ Figures from Magee, 'Powershed Politics', pp. 28–9, and accompanying notes.

hydro-dams on the Mekong, and has at least two more under construction; the complete plan appears to call for a cascade of at least eight, and perhaps as many as fifteen, large hydro-dams.⁶⁰

Planning for the Lower Mekong began under a US- and UN-backed Mekong River Committee in the 1950s; China and the Democratic Republic of (North) Vietnam were excluded, and Cambodian participation was also intermittent as its relations with the US fluctuated. While Lyndon Johnson, among others, spoke frequently of a major Lower Mekong Project modeled on the US Tennessee Valley Authority, no substantial work was done during the war years; what were apparently private US promises to help build Mekong dams as part of postwar reconstruction aid for Vietnam were never implemented either. Only in the late 1980s did a new Mekong River Commission emerge, with Vietnam and Cambodia now full members.⁶¹ The Commission is relatively weak, however—neither China nor Burma are members—and the riparian states are mostly developing their own projects, often with partners from China, Japan or the US. So far China's main interest in the Lower Mekong has been in navigation. A whole series of projects have been carried out since 2000 to improve shipping, and traffic appears to have increased significantly in the last five years, along with road construction linking Yunnan province to Burma, Thailand and Laos. It is not clear just how important a shipping artery China hopes to develop along the Mekong. While one Chinese official spoke of Middle East oil shipments coming up the Mekong to China, should the US Navy block the Straits of Malacca in some future conflict, it seems implausible that such shipments could ever be large enough to matter much—although the idea of moving oil on the Mekong, with the risk of toxic spills, is a matter of concern to its farmers and fisher-people.⁶²

While the hydro potential of the Lower Mekong may not match that of the Upper Mekong, it remains large—and all the more tempting when per

⁶⁰ Geoffrey Gunn and Brian McCartan, in 'Chinese Dams and the Great Mekong Floods of 2008', *Japan Focus*, 31 August 2008, suggest 15 dams; Magee, 'Powershed Politics', pp. 31–2, notes plans for between 8 and 14.

⁶¹ A useful short history is Nguyen Thi Dieu, *The Mekong River and the Struggle for Indochina*, Westport, CT 1999; pp. 49–96 cover the years between the end of World War II and American escalation in the mid-1960s.

⁶² Osborne, 'Water Politics of Southeast Asia', pp. 11–16; Gunn and McCartan, 'Chinese Dams and the Great Mekong Floods of 2008', note that China's emphasis for the Mekong is now changing from transport to energy.

capita income in the Greater Mekong region is estimated at one dollar a day. At least eleven large hydro-power dams are currently planned for the mainstream of the Mekong in Southeast Asia, mostly in Laos.⁶³ While there are widespread concerns that these dams could harm agriculture and fishing in the Lower Mekong—both of which are absolutely essential to the lives of its almost 70 million residents—regimes thinking in terms of industry, cities and ‘modern’ development may give electricity a higher priority. Meanwhile, the rather weak coordination among Lower Mekong states, and the absence of any real control on what China does, may well create a ‘prisoner’s dilemma’ that encourages dam construction: if others are going to mess up the river’s ecosystem anyway, why not at least get some electricity for one’s own people out of it?

An obvious but important point here is that there is no ‘ideal’ river, divorced from any point of view or set of interests. For instance, if Chinese projections about the effects of the three existing dams and the two under construction on the Lancang–Upper Mekong are correct, the results would be a greater flow downstream in the dry season, and lesser in the wet season, with no change in overall annual flow; this would be good for navigation, for power generation, and perhaps for irrigation as well.⁶⁴ Projects designed to aid navigation also generally aim to balance out seasonal water flows. But even if this is true, dams on the Lancang could nonetheless have a serious impact on Lower Mekong fisheries, for at least two reasons. First, dams inevitably trap some nutrient-rich sediment that would otherwise flow through to the delta; this has been a problem with big dams elsewhere, appears already to be happening in parts of Yunnan affected by the first three Lancang dams, and is expected to happen on the Lower Mekong as well. Second, many species of fish respond to subtle variations in water flow to know when to migrate and spawn; changes in the seasonal timing of peak flow after the completion of the Three Gorges Dam, for instance, has had a devastating effect on four species of Yangzi River carp. The UN estimates that 40 million people are active in Lower Mekong fisheries, and one report estimates

⁶³ See Foundation for Ecological Recovery website, ‘Key Points’ from the International Conference, ‘Mekong Mainstream Dams: People’s Voices across Borders’, 12–13 November 2008.

⁶⁴ Dore and Yu, ‘Yunnan Hydropower Expansion’, p. 21, cite estimated increases of dry-season flows ranging from 40 to 90 per cent for various points on the river. The claim that these dams will have only limited effects is far from universally accepted—many blame the Lancang dams for last year’s huge Mekong floods: Gunn and McCartan, ‘Chinese Dams and the Great Mekong Floods of 2008’.

that local fishing provides 80 per cent of the protein for people living in the region, as well as significant export revenues. Thai and Lao fishermen claim that the Chinese dams already in existence on the Upper Mekong have begun affecting their catches, while spokesmen for the dam-builders claim these projects have had no significant impact on the Lower Mekong. There are also claims that reduced water flow at some times of year has led to greater invasion of the delta by salt water, harming agriculture.⁶⁵

Dams on the Middle and Lower Mekong could have other effects as well. They will interfere with fish migration, which is concentrated on the lower and middle (especially lower) parts of the river. Mitigating technologies to allow for fish passage have proved only partially effective even on low dams in North America and Europe, and the Mekong poses a vastly more challenging problem: the amount of fish biomass is perhaps 100 times what it is on the Columbia, where fish ladders have achieved some positive results, and the number of species several times greater. (The more diverse the species, the more various the times and places involved in migrations.)⁶⁶ The territory that the Middle and Lower Mekong passes through is also much less steep and even more biodiverse than the Upper Mekong—and being lower and more tropical, would probably have higher methane emissions from any reservoirs. In numerous ways, then, downstream dams on the Mekong may be more dangerous than upstream ones, and they would be far more expensive per megawatt generated. But their benefits would accrue mostly to people in the same countries that will suffer their probable harms—and that might be all that matters to planners thinking in terms of national interests.

Unilateralism?

However, while everybody is looking to dam the rivers descending from the Himalayas, China's position is unique. It is not only that most of the

⁶⁵ Jorgen Jensen, '1,000,000 Tonnes of Fish from the Mekong', Mekong River Fisheries Newsletter, *Catch and Culture*, vol. 2, no. 1, August 1996; Frank Zeller, 'New Rush to Dam Mekong Alarms Environmentalists', Agence France Presse, 27 March 2008; 'UN Says China Dams Threaten Water Supplies to Mekong Delta Farmers', VietNamNet/TT, 27 May 2009. See also Elizabeth Economy, *The River Runs Black: The Environmental Challenge to China's Future*, Ithaca 2005, p. 204.

⁶⁶ See Patrick Dugan, 'Mainstream Dams as Barriers to Fish Migration', Mekong River Fisheries Newsletter, *Catch and Culture*, vol. 14, no. 3, December 2008.

rivers in question start on China's side of the border, so that Beijing's claims cannot be pre-empted by actions further upstream. A second crucial difference is that the PRC alone, of all the countries involved, can finance any project it chooses without recourse to international lenders. While the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and big private banks are not among the world's most ardent environmentalists, they have—either for their own reasons or because of pressures from third parties—refused to support some particularly controversial projects. China's domestic dam-building industry is also increasingly technically sophisticated, and is now exporting its engineering know-how in this area. Thus, the only constraints Chinese dam-building faces are those generated within the country, and these are often—though not always—quite weak. Late in January 2009, Jiang Gaoming of the Chinese Academy of Sciences released a sobering piece about how accelerating the construction of dams in China's southwest—part of the PRC's ambitious stimulus package to fight the global recession—is worsening the already considerable environmental and social risks involved, with some projects beginning before any Environmental Impact Assessments have been completed.⁶⁷ Protests against Three Gorges by some leading scientists and engineers did not stop that project.⁶⁸ It remains to be seen whether they will have more effect in the future.

In short, the damage to China's neighbours from this approach to its water and energy needs could be severe—and the potential to raise political tensions is commensurate. Previous water diversion projects affecting the source of the Mekong have already drawn protests from Vietnam; and, as noted above, a project on the Nu, suspended in the face of significant domestic and foreign opposition in 2004 and then restarted, has recently been halted again by order of Wen Jiabao. But some projects now underway or being contemplated have considerably larger implications, both for the Chinese and for foreigners. The diversion of the Yalong Zangbo—if that is indeed on the agenda—would have the largest implications of all. If the waters could arrive in North China safely and relatively unpolluted—by no means sure—having generated considerable power along the way, the relief for China's seriously

⁶⁷ Jiang Gaoming, 'The High Price of Developing Dams', *China Dialogue*, 22 January 2009.

⁶⁸ McCormack cites protests by, among others, the senior water engineer Huang Wanli: 'Water Margins', p. 13. Probably the best known critic of the Three Gorges, Dai Qing, is also an engineer by training, though not a water engineer.

strained hydro-ecology would be considerable. On the other hand, the impact on eastern India and Bangladesh, with a combined population even larger than North China's, could be devastating. The potential for such a project to create conflicts between China and India—and to exacerbate existing conflicts over shared waterways between India and Bangladesh—is clear.

Climate change

Evidence is meanwhile mounting that, thanks to climate change, the water supplies all these projects seek to tap are less dependable than one might hope. A 2008 report published in *Geophysical Research Letters* noted that recent samples taken from Himalayan glaciers were missing two markers that are usually easy to find, reflecting open-air nuclear tests in 1951–52 and 1962–63. The reason: the glacier apparently had lost any ice built up since the mid-1940s, melting not just from the edges but from the top as well.⁶⁹ And since the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that the Himalayan highlands will warm at about twice the average global rate over the next century, there is every reason to think the situation will get worse. One estimate suggests that a third of Himalayan glaciers will disappear by 2050, and two thirds by 2100.⁷⁰ Current models predict that this will happen much faster in the western than the eastern Himalayas; the situation for Pakistan and northwest India is thus particularly grim, with an initial windfall period of increased flows to be followed by a devastating loss of water in the already declining Indus, Sutlej and other rivers.⁷¹ If that scenario is right, then even if all the engineering challenges of the South-to-North Water Transfer can be solved—and even if we ignore the costs to other users of these waters—the resulting benefits might prove short-lived.

Climate change poses other problems as well. Among the most serious are glacial lake 'outburst' floods. As glaciers in high-altitude regions melt, they can form large lakes behind natural dams of ice and rock.

⁶⁹ Natahe Kehrwald, Lonnie Thompson, Yao Tandong, Ellen Mosley-Thompson, Ulrich Schotterer, Vasily Alfimov, Jürg Beer, Jost Eikenberg and Mary Davis, 'Mass Loss on Himalayan Glacier Endangers Water Resources', *Geophysical Research Letters*, vol. 35, L22503, 2008.

⁷⁰ Gardner, 'Tibetan Glacial Shrink to Cut Water Supply by 2050'.

⁷¹ Briscoe, *India's Water*, p. 32 has projections for the Indus, Ganges and Brahmaputra.

These are somewhat like the temporary lakes that formed behind dams of debris after the Sichuan earthquake last May, except that some of the 'wall' is ice. Such lakes are dangerous because they can burst through their barriers at any moment, creating devastating flash-floods downstream. (This was why Chinese soldiers dynamited the walls of Sichuan lakes, before they got any bigger.) Floods of this kind could easily overwhelm man-made dams downstream, causing a chain reaction of failure. Bhutan has identified 2,600 such lakes within its borders, including 25 at high risk of bursting out.⁷² Meanwhile, though projections of likely changes in the monsoon due to global warming vary significantly, most suggest that South Asia will see fewer days of rain per year but a larger number of 'extreme precipitation events'—raising the need for water storage, but also increasing the risk of catastrophic failure should a large dam be built without sufficient allowances for these variations.

China is not, of course, the only country to try solving its water problems at the expense of its neighbours. I am writing this in southern California, where far more people live than could ever have been accommodated without diverting Colorado River water that once flowed to Mexico—some of which, by treaty, should still be doing so. And it would be foolish to rule out large projects in addressing the serious water and energy shortages facing hundreds of millions of people throughout this enormous region. But it seems increasingly clear that, even in a best-case scenario, such projects cannot solve all the problems they are meant to address—and they are likely to worsen many others.

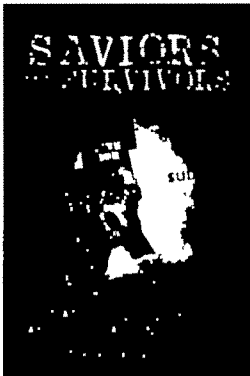
Averting major disasters will require choosing carefully among the projects proposed, and coordinating efforts across national borders, to a much greater extent than is the case today. At least in the long run, technologies such as wind and solar seem much better bets to provide genuinely clean and affordable power; how to find badly needed palliatives for the immediate future without locking in reliance on less satisfactory technologies is a very difficult question. Above all, surviving the looming water crises probably rests much less on mega-projects and more on the implementation of an endless series of small-scale, unglamorous and sometimes painful conservation measures: fixing pipes and lining ditches; making factories treat water so that it can be reused; selective

⁷² Ann-Kathrin Schneider, 'Dam Boom in Himalayas Will Create Mountains of Risk', *World Rivers Review*, vol. 24, no. 1, March 2009, p. 10.

implementation of more efficient irrigation technologies; building some smaller dams; accepting greater reliance on imported food, and thus higher food prices elsewhere in the world; and continuing to create huge numbers of new non-farm jobs—without straining either the environment or the social fabric to breaking point.

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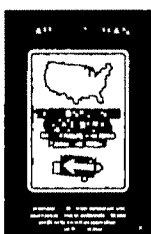
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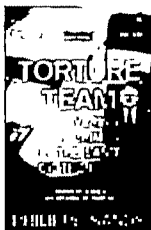
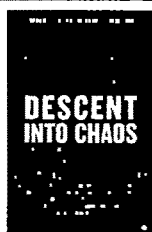
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MIROSLAV HROCH

LEARNING FROM SMALL NATIONS

Can you tell us about your family origins, and the intellectual and cultural milieu in which you were raised?

I WAS BORN IN Prague in 1932. My parents—both Czech by origin—had come to the city from the provinces in the 1920s. My father was a skilled worker who went on to become a technician; a socialist, but Catholic and strongly anti-Communist. Perhaps, later on, his difficulty in understanding my decision to study humanities, which he saw as pointless, inclined me more to study topics that would have some social relevance. My mother's father was also a socialist, but with staunch anti-clerical and national feelings. Religion was never discussed in the family and played little role in my formation, beyond the not-very-attractive teaching at elementary school. The decisive intellectual environment for me was the eight years spent at the Gymnasium, where Latin and Greek were the core of the syllabus.

Did your early 'national' experiences—the Nazi occupation, Prague uprising and liberation, and the period from 1945–48, by contrast to the Stalinist era that followed Gottwald's takeover—mark your world outlook in any definable way?

The years of occupation above all schooled me in fear. I learned to be distrustful, a capability which later became important for survival. I remember the uprising of May 1945, in which my father participated, as a time of great euphoria—and pride; after the liberation, the whole of Czechoslovakian society was intensely patriotic. The three years that followed seem to me today the only period of my life in which I felt absolutely free to express myself. Naturally, this is an illusion, for I

was certainly being influenced by the media. February 1948 was seen by everyone in my family as a disaster, but I also felt a strong sense of indignation towards the non-Communist politicians, who had opened the door for the Communists to come to power and then fled to the West. I knew little of the Treaty of Yalta and the division of the world between the superpowers. After 1948, the patriotism of the liberation era had to be politically modified to meet the requirements of the Cold War. Czech national feeling had to be made compatible with love for the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, while attitudes to the West needed to distinguish between 'the people', the object of positive sentiments, and the 'bourgeoisie', the enemy—pedagogical concepts that were, needless to say, ineffective and soon degenerated into farce.

What led you to study history at university, and then to focus on the crisis of the 17th century—your MA thesis on the Habsburg general Wallenstein, and doctoral dissertation on Baltic trade during the Thirty Years' War?

I had originally intended to study literature at university, rather than history—I saw it as necessary to maintain the Czech cultural tradition, which I felt was endangered by Communist nihilism. But I was discouraged by the low level of intellectual discussion and the political atmosphere, and after a year switched to history, where there were still some teachers from the pre-revolutionary days, and where the climate was friendlier and less politicized. My favourite teacher, Josef Polišenský, was from the pre-1948 generation, and it was he who suggested I study the Wallenstein archives and analyse his less well known activities on the Baltic coast. The fact that I knew German and Nordic languages also played some role in this—as a young boy, I had been involved in a Red Cross project taking undernourished Czech children on summer holidays to Norway, so I learned basic Norwegian, which opened up Scandinavian languages for me. Studying Wallenstein began as quite a traditional topic, but it served as a bridge to my doctoral work on the inter-relationship between trade and politics during the Thirty Years' War, where I combined political history with the history of trade, prices and transportation. This was considered too far removed from standard approaches, and Polišenský was not very enthusiastic about it. Later, when the debate on the 17th century reached the socialist countries, I concentrated on the distinction between crisis and decline. I tried to prove that crisis did not automatically mean decline, but was rather a manifestation of the sharpening internal contradictions of a system; if

the system was able to overcome the crisis through partial changes, it could emerge stabilized or even strengthened.

At what stage did you begin to study national problems?

My interest in nation-forming processes—how national movements began—came rather early on, in the 1950s. At the start of my second year of history at university, I wrote an essay on the social structure of the membership of a 19th-century Czech patriotic grouping. I found that the national movement's supporters were neither from the bourgeoisie, as the official Stalinist line had it, nor from the peasantry, as held by Czech patriotic myth, but rather from the petty bourgeoisie—craftsmen, shopkeepers—and the intelligentsia. This starting point was somehow indirectly connected to the fact that we were part of the Soviet imperium, and at that time national movements were criticized as instruments of the bourgeoisie. There are several articles by Marx and Engels from 1848 criticizing Slav national movements, and especially the Czechs, as counter-revolutionary. Some Soviet and also Czech historians in the 1950s denounced them as 'reactionary', and I regarded this as the first step to Russification.

Which authors influenced you most at this time, and how did your research develop?

The first author to influence me in a negative sense was Stalin, with his thesis that nations were formed through the struggles of the bourgeoisie for markets. This is what we learned in Gymnasium. The first author to have a positive impact on me was the Austro-Marxist Otto Bauer, whose *Social Democracy and the Nationalities Question* argued that nations had been formed in a series of different stages, since the Middle Ages. It was a very important and interesting book, but difficult to get hold of in the 50s, because it was forbidden as 'revisionist' in Czechoslovakia. Another significant work for me was Karl Deutsch's *Nationalism and Social Communication*, published in 1953, and which I read in the early 60s; at the time, I saw 'communication' as a very important explanatory factor in nation-formation. Indirect inspiration also came from Eric Hobsbawm, whose *Age of Revolution* came out in 1962, and which contained a short chapter on nations and another on European Romanticism. He describes a situation on the threshold of modernity, and sees nations and national movements as emerging from what today would be called

a 'crisis of identities', though he uses other terms. I think this was a very important hypothesis, and one I still support.

But at this time, my motivation in studying national questions was above all scholarly: to look at this fascinating phenomenon, unfolding in Europe at different times, in different territories, but with the same concepts, the same way of thinking. It could not be explained solely by the 'migration' of the national idea—otherwise, why did the Catalans, living next to France, start their movement a hundred years after the French Revolution, whereas the Czechs, who are much further away, began theirs within ten years of it? Was this nation-formation process an abstract one, or was it the concrete sum of actions by really existing people—and which people? What motivated them to be patriots? This was why I set out to study the 'social preconditions of national revival'. There was also, perhaps, a certain satisfaction for me in seeing that the Czechs were far from the only ones to struggle for their 'revival'; a nostalgic element of searching for affinities with our destiny. If there was any political undercurrent to my research, it came from a desire to introduce some kind of revisionism into the field. I tried to use statistical data, which at the time I felt could not be questioned, in order to demonstrate that it was possible to use Marxist methodology to explain nation-formation in a more sophisticated and convincing way than official Soviet Marxism-Leninism did.

On the other side of the Iron Curtain, in Western Europe, my area of research was seen as very out of date. I remember visiting West Germany and Denmark in the 60s, and meeting some young historians who could not understand my interest in such 'reactionary' phenomena as nations and 'nationalism'. On this, their view did not differ from those of liberals who considered 'nationalism' an outdated legacy of the 19th century. It was, incidentally, during a year-long stay in Marburg—where I attended the seminar of Wolfgang Abendroth, among others—that I learned to understand and appreciate Marxism as a serious research method.

*How did you come to adopt the comparative method deployed in your 1968 work, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*¹, and what were*

¹ *Die Vorkämpfer der nationalen Bewegung bei den kleinen Völkern Europas*, Prague 1968; *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, Cambridge 1985.

the problems involved in applying it to such complex historical processes as nation-formation?

The goal of studying the Czech national 'revival' in a comparative European context was not all that innovative, though it is true that in the early 60s the approach was not especially popular among historians. Naturally, it was acceptable to make comparisons, even within traditional historiography, but merely as a tool for defining the specificity of historical phenomena. It was precisely this that struck me as too narrow and outdated, since Hobsbawm had made a strong impression on me. However, I also understood that his approach could be used for the purposes of historical synthesis, but not analysis—it was generalizing and transnational, but not comparative. At that time I did not know Weber's work, but tried, step by step, to develop a workable set of analytical procedures of my own. Firstly, I sought to define the processes to be compared, in order to be sure that they belonged to the same category; in my case, it was not 'nations' but more specifically 'national movements'. Then, I had to clarify the aim of the comparison, which in this instance would be not to find differences and specificities, but to identify common features that would allow me to produce a general explanation.

I also had to solve a problem of time: the fact that national movements did not proceed synchronously. I decided to look for analogical stages, or situations, that could be distinguished within the trajectory of each national movement, and then to define those stages that would be comparable across different cases. On this basis, I constructed a periodization according to the degree of public acceptance that national movements gained. I identified a Phase A, at the beginning of every national revival, marked by a passionate concern on the part of a group of individuals, usually intellectuals, for the study of the oppressed nationality's language, culture and history. Phase B is characterized by patriotic agitation by an organized movement, actively fermenting national consciousness. Phase C refers to the appearance of a mass national movement, extending over the whole territory. In my view Phase B, the period of national agitation, was the decisive one in the nation-forming process. A further step was to select the criteria for comparison—a set of questions that could be answered for all national movements. I chose to examine the social composition of the group of leading patriots of Phase B. Perhaps this set of procedures was not very

sophisticated, but it proved an effective and workable tool for analysis. Later on, of course, I formulated the principles of comparative method in more consequential manner—most recently in a collection of my articles from 2007.²

In Social Preconditions you distinguish between, on the one hand, an established model of European nation-formation, taking place as part of the transition from feudalism to capitalist social relations, and broadly applicable to the 'great' or 'ruling' nations—France, England, Spain, Germany, Denmark; and on the other, the different experience of 'small' or 'oppressed' nations, dominated by a ruling class of another nationality, and with a varying degree of assimilation to it, in which citizens were confronted with a choice of national identity: that of the rulers or that of their own oppressed nation. What determined the selection of the 'small nation' movements you chose to study—Norwegian, Czech, Finnish, Estonian, Lithuanian, Slovak, Flemish, but not the Balkans?

Since I aimed to find general explanatory factors in the social background of the movements' actors, I had to choose as objects of comparison national movements that developed under different political, cultural and social conditions, and which also produced varying results. At the same time, they had to be distinct from the Czech experience, which meant I had to avoid almost all the national movements in the Habsburg Empire, and expand the horizon towards both East and West. The second criterion for selection was to include movements whose social structure had already been at least partially researched—this applied to the Estonians and Slovaks—or where the relevant sources had been published, as with the Norwegians, Finns and Lithuanians. Having secured a Humboldt scholarship in Germany, I also undertook private research in Ghent and Antwerp so as to include the (still) unsuccessful Flemish movement. Almost thirty years later, incidentally, some Flemish colleagues told me how encouraged they had been to see that I had included the Flemish in the category of nations-to-be. I was unable to include the Balkans at the time, but later on others inspired by my approach produced work on the social structure of the Macedonian and Bulgarian movements.

² See Preface to *Comparative Studies in Modern European History*, Aldershot 2007. *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe* is also revisited in 'From National Movement to the Fully Formed Nation', NLR 1/198, March–April 1993.

How would you position Social Preconditions relative to other works of the time?

First I need to point out the book's complicated history. The basic concept was formulated and the text written in the 60s; it came out in German in Prague in 1968. But there was almost a twenty-year gap between this and the publication of the English edition, which is essentially an expanded version of the German. The initial proposal for an English translation came in 1974 from New Left Books. But I discovered that they also published authors forbidden by our regime—Trotsky, for example—and felt it could have been dangerous for me to go ahead, since the regime could associate me with the ideas of the publishers. I somehow discovered Hobsbawm was involved in this—he had read the book in German, and I supposed that it was he who recommended it be translated into English. I had met him in 1964, when he had come to a conference in Prague, and I now wrote to him explaining my difficulty, which he understood perfectly well. Much later, I found out that Hobsbawm had written an article in the 1970s in which he spoke positively about my book; perhaps understandably, since he recognized that my non-dogmatic concept of Marxism—Gellner at one point called me 'semi-Marxist'—was very close to his own methodological approach. In the 1980s, my colleagues and I wanted to invite him to Prague, but the Czechoslovak regime regarded him as a 'revisionist', which was worse than being a non-Marxist, so he decided not to come because he did not want to compromise people here.

Social Preconditions was then offered to Cambridge UP, who in 1979 asked me to add some material on individual national movements, only to say it was now too long. I produced a shortened version, but they then lost the manuscript, so I had to reconstruct it. The book was finally published only in 1985. As a result of all this, I was unable to refer to the important works published in the intervening years: Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, Hobsbawm's *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* or Anthony Smith's *Theories of Nationalism*—a circumstance I only got the chance to explain in 2000, in the preface to the second edition.

So, in a way, there are two contexts in which to position the book. In the 1960s, when it was written, there were very few books on this topic. The most important were those of Deutsch and of Eugen Lemberg, a

Sudeten German historian whose two-volume *Nationalismus* of 1964 confirmed me in my decision to use the comparative method, and prompted me to criticize the broad and undifferentiated use of the term 'nationalism'. With regard to the 1980s context, some basic differences between my work and the books published then have to be stressed: firstly, I never pretended to develop an all-encompassing 'theory of nationalism', because I preferred to study the nation as a large social group. Second, my approach was comparative and historical; today I would say, influenced by historical sociology. Thirdly, it was focused on the national movements of non-dominant, 'small' nations, which were almost ignored in the literature of the 1980s, with the exception of John Breuilly's work. Finally, I regarded, and still do, nation-formation as a specifically European process—I was not concerned with what took place beyond Europe.

In principle, though, it would seem possible to apply your comparative framework, with its sensitivity to the processes of capitalist transition, to extra-European nation-formation. Does this mean that you regard national movements outside Europe, typically against Western imperialism, as categorically distinct phenomena from any apparent counterparts in Europe?

This is a very complicated issue. Your question already implicitly includes two different situations: nation-formation in cases such as China or Korea, on the one hand, and on the other, the struggle for liberation from foreign colonialist rule. In this second situation, the struggle could also be motivated by tribal xenophobia; moreover, its aim—or the aim of its leaders—is to take power in a former colonial state, something quite different from the unit we would call a 'nation' in Europe (although closer to the Anglo-American usage, where nation essentially means state). The confusing thing is that these leaders use European terms such as 'the national interest', but the social, cultural and political reality behind them is totally different. At a third level: what about the 'nationalism' of movements struggling against local post-colonial states in Africa or Asia—the Igbo, Taiwanese, Uighurs, Tamils? Naturally, the idea of the nation has been transferred from culture to culture, and it would be very interesting to analyse this process, especially in the case of Latin America. Here, as far as I know, 'nationalist discourse' preceded, and influenced, the 'national awakening' in Spain, but chronologically came after the German, Magyar, Czech and Norwegian cases. I am sure that in some non-European instances, we could find analogous crises of

identity to those in Europe on the threshold of 'national revival'. But I admit that I also avoided non-European processes of nation-formation because I simply do not know enough about Asian, African or American history. And who does?

Could you explain why you feel the term 'nationalism' is so dysfunctional?

It is very easy to label as 'nationalism' every phenomenon or attribute that has anything to do with the nation or national matters, rather than differentiating between national identity, national consciousness, national awareness, patriotism, chauvinism, loyalty and so on. And it is not at all a 'neutral' term, as many Anglophone authors believe. In the American case, this supposed neutrality is pure hypocrisy: you find thousands of titles about 'American patriotism' but almost none about 'American nationalism'—the others are nasty nationalists, but we are noble-minded patriots! According to this terminology, both an SS man in occupied Norway and a member of the Norwegian resistance are 'nationalists'. In that case, what use does the term serve? Naturally, one can add adjectives to it, as Carlton Hayes did early in the 20th century. Tom Nairn's concept of nationalism as Janus-faced is helpful, to a certain extent. But does nationalism refer to an activity or a state of mind, or both?

We also need to bear in mind that the word 'nation', from which the term derives, has different connotations in different languages. In English, 'nationalism' is understood to imply a struggle for statehood, but this is not the case in German or Czech. In 18th-century definitions one can already see a difference between a 'political' concept of the nation in English and a 'cultural' one in German and Czech. The French understanding is somewhere in between, with both state and linguistic unification forming the basis for a nation. Anglo-Saxon authors writing on Slovene, Czech or Slovak national movements describe them as 'nationalist', with the explicit or implicit view that they were focused on a struggle for statehood, and then seem surprised when these leaderships did not fight for independence. This is an error, based on the fiction that a nation cannot exist without a state. In the Czech or German linguistic traditions, we speak of nations regardless of the political form in which they are organized. I have no difficulty speaking of Flemish or Catalan nations, because these are large social groups with a full social structure, developed culture and a strong national identity, which

is not the case of 'ethnic communities' such as the Galicians, Sorbs, Belorussians or Bretons.

Another example of the confusing effect of the term: in my 2005 book, *Das Europa der Nationen*, I wrote that war played no role in most 19th-century national movements except in the Balkans. One reviewer criticized this, arguing that I ignored the role of nationalism in the terrible wars of the 20th century. But of course, these were a consequence of the fact that, in the 20th century, we are dealing with fully formed nations, the product of previous processes of nation-formation. Reading such muddled arguments, you wonder where they come from. For all these reasons, I use the term 'nationalism' only for extreme cases, where expressions of national identity extend into overestimation of one's own nation and hatred towards others, as in the case of Croatia in the 1990s, for example.

Nevertheless, many nation-states did emerge after the First World War.

The fact that many European nations achieved statehood as a result of World War I is more an accident, resulting partly from the interests and decisions of great powers, and partly from the fact that national communities had already been constructed. We should not generalize the Balkan and Irish experiences: most national movements successfully achieved their Phase C without any involvement in wars—Czechs, Magyars, Slovenes, Slovaks, Finns, and so on.

In what respects do you regard Zionism as a typical, or an atypical, national movement in late 19th/early 20th-century Europe?

I regard Zionism as a specific national movement, within my conception of nation-formation. One of its basic specificities is that the object of national agitation did not live in a compact territory, so Zionism as a movement unfolded in very different conditions—under the semi-feudal absolutism of Russia on the one hand, and in constitutionalist states with some guaranteed civil rights on the other. In my view, this means that Zionism belongs simultaneously to two different types of national movement: the 'belated' type, like the Ukrainian, Lithuanian and Latvian examples, which vegetated under an *ancien régime* before developing a mass base; but also to the 'Western' or 'disintegrated' type, like those of the Welsh, Catalans or Flemish, which struggled to conduct

their agitation among a range of existing political programmes. In the late 1990s I wrote an article in which I suggested that it was perhaps this dual typological condition that explained the difficulty Zionist agitation had in reaching the broad masses of the Jewish population in Europe. A second major peculiarity of Zionism is that its Phase B was successful only outside of Europe, in Israel: its success or failure in Europe itself cannot be proved because of the Holocaust. My article on this was translated into English and published in Israel, so perhaps people there find my points acceptable.³

Social Preconditions was published in 1968. What were the repercussions for you of the openings of that decade, and then the repression following August 1968?

I worked on *Social Preconditions* in the 1960s, amid the spirit of creativity and optimism of those times. Only in the 1960s was it possible to apply for a long-term scholarship in Germany, and to get the book published in German. I did not participate in any political activities in Prague during 1968—partly because I did not trust the former Stalinists who had become reformists, but above all because I was mostly abroad. In a way, I found it more inspiring and promising to observe the struggle for the reform of capitalism, in Paris and in Germany. So I did not suffer any repression after August; like most other people, I was controlled, but not persecuted.

How did your work develop after this?

In the Czechoslovakia of the 1970s, it was not recommended to continue work on concepts of 'nationalism'. I returned to my research on Baltic trade during the Thirty Years' War, and wrote a comparative book on the subject.⁴ Also in the late 70s, I produced a book with my colleague Josef Petráň on the 17th-century crisis, which was translated into German—by this time there was an international discussion on this topic, which Hobsbawm had been one of the first to initiate in the 1950s.⁵ After that

³ See 'Zionism as European National Movement' (1998), in *Comparative Studies in Modern European History*.

⁴ Published in German as *Handel und Politik im Ostseeraum während des Dreissigjährigen Krieges*, Prague 1976.

⁵ Hroch and Josef Petráň, *17. století: krize feudální společnosti?*, Prague 1976; German translation: *Das 17. Jahrhundert: Krise der Feudalgesellschaft?*, Hamburg 1981.

I wrote a book in Czech on the European revolutions of 1600–1900 in comparative perspective, as a counterpart to my reflections on the crisis of the 17th century.⁶ In the late 80s, after the English publication of *Social Preconditions*, I wrote on the impact of the French Revolution in Europe, and co-edited a book on the Counter-Reformation and the Inquisition—though this was before the opening of the Spanish archives, which were closed under Franco and even for some years after his death.⁷

Can you tell us more about the comparative study of revolutions?

It was an attempt to combine three levels of analysis: firstly, an extensive overview of theories of revolution in West and East; second, a discussion of the individual revolutions, their specificities and role in national life; and thirdly, comparative studies of themes such as the 'revolutionary imaginary', the role of popular masses, 'intentions and results', the social origins of participants. Above all, I tried to question the dogmatic thesis that revolution was everywhere the basic factor in historical progress. But censorship was still quite strong, so the results were not very satisfactory. Later, I moved towards a 'revisionist' conception of revolutions: why not understand them as neutral phenomena, sudden structural changes of political system realized by violence or the threat of violence? This would mean including not only progressive instances, but also 1933, 1948 or 1989. The problem remains, though, of what to do with social revolutions.

What was your experience of 1989?

Personally, I felt a mixture of euphoria and substantial scepticism. But I must admit to a painful error I made before the November events: having successfully avoided any political engagements during the 70s and most of the 80s, in the late 80s I began to be involved in pressing for *perestroika*, hoping that the programme of the Prague Spring of 68 could somehow be revitalized. This proved an illusion—as was my expectation that it would be possible, after the fall of the Communist Party's dictatorship, to combine civil rights and liberties with a pluralized

⁶ *Buržoazní revoluce v Evropě*, Prague 1981.

⁷ Hroch and Vlasta Kubišová, *Velká francouzská revoluce a Evropa 1789–1800*, Prague 1990; and Hroch and Anna Skýbová, *Die Inquisition im Zeitalter der Gegenreformation*, Stuttgart 1985, published in both English and French as *Ecclesia militans*, London/Paris 1988.

economic sphere, comprising private, co-operative and state sectors. In December 1989, the students at Charles University elected me as director of the Historical Institute. But during the following year, I saw that there were younger, ambitious 'revolutionary' colleagues itching to get ahead in their careers, so I decided not to stand in their way—a tactic I had used successfully all my life. As a consequence, I could concentrate my energies on teaching and writing, both at home and abroad; one of the obvious results of 1989 being the end of censorship and the freedom to travel.

As a historian of national movements, how would you characterize the break-up of Czechoslovakia in 1993?

I was not at all shocked by it. The separation into two states was almost exclusively a matter of dividing power between politicians—national identity was already divided. Since I accepted the fact that the Slovaks are a nation, I was not surprised that Slovak politicians would seek full statehood. There was, however, something scandalous in the fact that they did not even ask the people. Incidentally, it is curious that although the concept of one Czechoslovak nation—the official ideology of the interwar republic—failed, a Czechoslovak identity nonetheless survived quite strongly among Czechs. As a result, after the break-up many Czechs of the older generation found it difficult to redefine their identity as a purely Czech one.

It is striking that so many writers on national questions should come from Bohemia: Bauer, Kohn, Deutsch, Lemberg, Gellner. How do you explain the strong Czech presence in this field?

My explanation is that the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and above all the Czech lands, was a kind of laboratory or training ground for national movements, where arguments were formulated and methods developed that could, rightly or wrongly, be used as models in the analysis of other national movements of the same 'stateless' type. Remember that chronologically, the Czech national movement was among the earliest, having begun in the early 19th century, like the Magyar and German ones; elsewhere in Europe, national movements started two or three decades afterwards, if not later. Of course, this does not mean I am proposing a model of cultural transfer from Bohemia to other places.

One should also recall that the scholars in question were not all Czech by origin: Otto Bauer was German-Jewish, as were Hans Kohn, a Prague-born Zionist scholar who emigrated to Palestine and later to America, and Karl Deutsch. Deutsch's mother was one of the German Social-Democrat members of the Czechoslovak Parliament, and organized help for émigrés arriving from Nazi Germany. She and Deutsch left Prague for the US in 1938; when he died he left his library to the city. Eugen Lemberg was neither Czech nor Jewish, but Sudeten German. He was the first author in Central Europe to try to introduce 'nationalism' into historical research as a neutral term, understanding it very broadly as 'unconditional loyalty towards a supra-personal unit'; in that sense, nationalism existed in the Soviet and Communist cases, as well as in some medieval situations. But in the empirical part of his work, Lemberg's approach was rather traditional, and his Sudeten German background showed through in his critique of the 'defensive nationalism' of small nations, and his view that its defining feature was an inferiority complex. Ernest Gellner was actually born in Paris but grew up in Prague, and lived there till his family emigrated in 1939. He enlisted in the British-based Czechoslovakian armed forces during the War, but after that he remained in Britain, and in that sense was British by education—though he spoke excellent Czech, with no accent. I became aware of him in the 1980s, but only met him for the first time in 1991, at a conference in Spain. After that we began to be in frequent contact. He came to Prague in 1993 to found the Centre for the Study of Nationalism at the Central European University here, and a few months before his death in 1995 he invited me to join the Centre's scientific council.

Have you made any significant revisions to the concepts in your earlier works?

In my 1968 book, I analysed the social preconditions for the transition from agitation to mass movement, that is, from Phase B to Phase C. The most important gap in that work concerns why Phase B began—why this first step from A to B, from a neutral position focused on research to a dynamic stance? In other words, how to explain the beginnings of national agitation. This was addressed in my 2005 book, *Das Europa der Nationen*, which I think is the best I have written on this topic.⁸

⁸ *Das Europa der Nationen: die moderne Nationsbildung im europäischen Vergleich*, Göttingen 2005.

It is a sort of concluding volume in a trilogy which began with *Social Preconditions*—asking: who were the activists?—and continued with *In the National Interest*, which asked: what did they want?⁹ *The Europe of Nations* tries to give a general interpretation of nation-formation as a social and cultural phenomenon, and provides an extensive general introduction to the various theories at stake. It was published in a series entitled 'Syntheses', and presents a consensual explication, rather than counter-posing the established approaches—primordialist, perennialist, constructivist, modernist, ethno-symbolist—as conflicting paradigms. In fact, I try to demonstrate that many supposed contradictions are exaggerated and artificial, particularly that between perennialism and constructivism. While most recent books on the subject try to present a new theory, or at least new terminology, my aim was to be original through being unoriginal, but consensual. Also, in contrast to my earlier books, this one covers the nation-formation process throughout Europe: not only the formation of small nations, but also of 'state-nations'. The first section gives an overview of the circumstances—ethnic and cultural specificities, institutions, buildings, relics of history—that already existed, independent of the wishes and dreams of 'nationalists'. The second part deals with 'construction': national organizing and agitation, including linguistic programmes and the struggle for political power and social emancipation. All this is discussed in connection with the advance of modernity—the conception of nation-formation as a constitutive part of the advent of modernity being another of the gaps in my work that had to be filled.

Václav Klaus has described the European Union as an 'oppressor entity', comparing the impact of Brussels to that of Moscow, or Habsburg Vienna, and evoking a Czech 'trauma of betrayal'. Looking at national sentiments in a long-term perspective, do you see any parallels between such attitudes to the EU and previous relationships with historical Others?

With respect to Václav Klaus, I am not sure he knows what kind of betrayal he is imagining, but he is always using, or abusing, this term. The notion of betrayal, of an outside threat, is itself part of a Czech historical stereotype, always unfolding according to the same paradigm. I

⁹ V národním zájmu: požadavky a cíle evropských národních hnutí devatenáctého století v komparativní perspektivě, Prague 1996; English translation: *In the National Interest: Demands and Goals of European National Movements of the Nineteenth Century: A Comparative Perspective*, Prague 2000.

would call it the Hussite stigma—the idea that we are very exceptional and very progressive. This initially appeared during the First Republic, from 1918–38, when the Czechs saw themselves as the only democracy in Central Europe. The Communist takeover in 1948 is another example—at that time, many Communists thought they would produce an alternative, specifically Czech type of socialism, different from that of the Soviet Union, although this idea quickly faded, and in the 1950s many of them were repressed and executed. During the Prague Spring, there was also this illusion that we were forging something special, a novel combination of democracy and socialism. As used by Klaus, the stereotype may also include another Czech complex, perhaps less common, of struggling *proti všem*—‘against all’, as in the title of a very popular 1893 novel by Alois Jirásek. Again, this comes from Hussite times, and still survives, though naturally only in oral forms, in Czech family traditions. This ‘against all’ is almost explicitly articulated by Klaus these days in his strong anti-Lisbon position.

As far as the impact of the EU on national identity is concerned, this again depends on how we define the nation. In the Anglo-Saxon sense, in which ‘nation’ implies a state and therefore power, the European Union could be considered a negative ‘Other’, threatening the monopoly of power within the nation-state. I interpret the euro-scepticism of some Czech politicians, including Klaus, as instrumentalist in inspiration—they are afraid of seeing their powers diminished. But if you understand a nation as a community with a shared culture, a common past, then I do not see how the EU can endanger it—culture is about prestige, not power. On the contrary, Europe in this sense is one of the few available instruments for resisting Americanization. There is no danger of our identity dissolving within Europe; the danger is more that we will become a subculture within American (anti-)culture. Nevertheless, Czech intellectuals are divided on this question. For example, some of our historians reacted very negatively when Merkel spoke of the need for a textbook of European history, as if they were afraid that ‘they’—the Europeans—would ‘write our history’. This may be a question of provincialization. Despite the fact of having had so much more freedom to travel and opportunity for scholarships over the past twenty years, Czech researchers have become far narrower in their choice of topics; most of the younger generation study only Czech history, without attempting to

look at European themes. This self-limitation is really shocking, and one of the causes of hostility to the European textbook.

On the question of national sentiment and 'historical Others', there is no doubt that the Soviet invasion in 1968 strengthened nationalist feelings. On the other hand, from the 1960s onwards, contacts with the West have rather served to spread feelings of servility and inferiority, particularly with regard to the USA. Although it is difficult to generalize, I have the impression that instead of 'strengthening' national feeling, we observe a confusion in this field. The result is that, over the last twenty years, explicitly 'nationalist' programmes have had only very weak support among the general population—compared, for example, with Poland, Hungary, France or Germany—yet there exist remarkably strong signs of xenophobia.

How would you evaluate the form of national feeling at play in the Czech protest movement against the US military radar base?

National feeling played a role at two levels: firstly, in political discourse, where some politicians spoke against 'foreign soldiers' being present on Czech territory; and second, in spontaneous popular aversion to foreign patronage and manipulation. But proponents of the radar base also argued in national terms, claiming it would be in the Czech interest to have it.

You spoke earlier of a 'crisis of identity', coterminous with the advent of modernity and the industrial revolution, as one of the preconditions for the awakening of national feelings in Europe. Is there a comparable crisis of identity today, and if so, what might be its outcomes?

Firstly, some parallels could be drawn between the 'new nationalisms' in post-Communist Europe after 1989—in the former Yugoslavia, Estonia, and so on—and the 19th-century national movements. There are many analogous elements in their situation—the destruction of the *ancien régime*, the insecurity as to what comes next. I have described some of these as instances of 'repeat performance': for example, Croat and Slovak nationalists in the 1990s imitated models of behaviour from the 19th century.¹⁰ Of course, there are also many differences.

¹⁰ 'Nationalism and National Movements: Comparing the Past and Present of Central and Eastern Europe', *Nations and Nationalism* 2, 1996, pp. 35–44.

But there has also been a broader, contrary trend—the rising individualism that is a key aspect of liberalism, or neo-liberalism. The classical national movements rested on notions of solidarity, of a man's responsibility for his own people, of working for one's nation in the name of humanity. These attitudes do not exist today as they did in the 19th century. So I do not think there could be a second or third wave of national revival. A 'virtual' national feeling may be possible, artificially produced by the media, but I cannot imagine a reproduction, in this digital sense, of one of the basic preconditions of strong national identity in the 19th century—the idea of the personalized and immortal nation: even though your own life is limited, through working for your nation you will survive with it, forever. This sentiment cannot be reproduced by digital means. But all of this, admittedly, only applies when there is peace and some kind of economic prosperity. In the case of economic decline, of international conflicts, conditions may change and then, perhaps, we may see more 'repeat performances'.

If anything, the phenomenon of digitalization has brought an increased isolation of individuals—a sign of a real crisis of identity. Connected with this is a serious crisis of historicism. I understand this phenomenon as a loss of perspective. Our young generation, and our societies in general, have no alternative for the system, no alternative for the future. The future does not need our visions any more; it seems to unfold automatically as a result of globalized processes. But if you lose the ability to imagine the future, you lose interest in history. Nowadays there is a great disorientation on this subject, but it presents an important challenge for professional historians. My own views on this have been changing. Previously, I argued that present-day society is unable and unwilling to imagine alternatives to globalized capitalism because it has lost any historical perspective. Recently I have begun to turn this around and see it from the opposite angle—asking whether the fall of historicism is not rather the consequence of a loss of perspectives for the future.

What recommendations would you give to a young scholar of these questions today?

Firstly, not to be emotionally involved in the topic—so neither against nor in favour of 'nationalism', for example. Then, to use a comparative approach wherever possible; to distinguish between terms, such

as 'nation', and the differentiated reality, never to forget that national discourse usually concerns not only ideas, but above all real interests both in the material sphere and in the struggle for power. And finally, to pay close attention to the social structure and the social origins of those who are formulating the national 'interests' and programmes—that is, the real actors.

This is an expanded version of an interview that originally appeared in *Tensões Mundiais*, vol. 3, no. 4, 2007.

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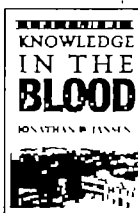
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R. W. JOHNSON

FALSE START IN SOUTH AFRICA

IN SOUTH AFRICA's first democratic election in 1994 the ubiquitous posters of the African National Congress read 'Jobs, jobs, jobs' and 'A Better Life for All'. The latter slogan is trotted out at each succeeding election; the former has never been seen again. The reason is simple: unemployment is now far higher than in 1994 and heading sharply upwards. On the most commonly used measure, the jobless figure has hovered in the 38–40 per cent range for some time; though even that counts people as employed if they have but a single hour's paid work (say, washing and polishing a car) in a week. On any reasonable measure of formal employment, over half the working population is jobless. True, one must also allow for the informal sector of street vegetable and fruit sellers, car guards, hawkers and the like. But very few enter that sector except out of desperation, and it shades easily into a vast underclass of beggars, prostitutes and criminals.

The reasons for this monumental failure are complex. The fact that around a third of the ANC's MPs and ministers are members of the South African Communist Party, and that most of the rest still rely on vulgar Marxist terminology, hardly increases domestic or foreign investor confidence. The flight of around one fifth of the white population since 1994—nearly a million people—represents a loss not only of perhaps 250,000 professional and entrepreneurial workers, but also of the 5–7 jobs which they are each estimated to have generated. The new government has also liberalized the old apartheid siege economy, which has cost jobs in the defence industries and in the erstwhile highly protected sectors that have failed to cope with Asian competition.

More ominous is the complete failure of post-apartheid education reform. The first Minister of Education, Sibusiso Bengu, blundered by getting rid of many of the best teachers, while his successor, Kader Asmal, compounded this disaster by reducing standards (in order to get a higher pass rate) and introducing a new syllabus incomprehensible to many teachers. On top of this many township schools are racked by violence, abusive and truant teachers, and a collapse of organization and morale. The government throws money at the problem but is scared of standing up to the thuggish teachers' union, which vigorously objects to any attempts at reform. The result is a catastrophe worse than the original introduction of Bantu Education by the apartheid government—indeed, it is quite normal to hear Bantu Education schools being held up as models far better than the present township equivalents. In addition many of the universities are lamentably managed so that there has been a clear decline in higher education too. The result is that the skills gap left by departing white (and Asian) professionals cannot be filled, and that South Africa simply lacks the skills required to maintain and run its sophisticated infrastructure and private sector.

The civil service has become a black hole of low skills, corruption and incompetence, and is now largely beyond government control. For example, Western aid donors elsewhere in the continent discovered that South Africa had become a major donor, thanks to hundreds of unplanned and uncoordinated acts of generosity by visiting South African ministers and parastatal bosses, all wanting to 'wow' their hosts in 'big man' style. Eager to ensure that this aid effort was coordinated with their own, the EU states financed an investigation by the South African Treasury into which ministries and parastatals had given aid. Over two years later it has proved simply impossible to get ministers and bureaucrats to reply to such enquiries. The lower-level administration serving provinces and municipalities is in an even worse state, crippling development initiatives before they start.

Panicked by rising unemployment, the Mbeki government responded by creating Africa's first welfare state. Old-age pensions were equalized up to the apartheid level for whites, and poor households were allowed a modicum of free water and electricity—to which millions added a great deal more both by illegal connections and by a steadfast refusal to pay rates and taxes, thus bankrupting two-thirds of the country's local authorities. To prevent their complete collapse, the Treasury has

stepped in and regularly wiped off the bad debt, which is to say that this huge burden is routinely assumed by the national budget. The government has also introduced disability grants, now claimed by many of South Africa's 5.7 million HIV sufferers, and child allowances for those up to the age of 15, which the ANC now promises to increase to 18. The result is that 13.5 million South Africans, out of a total 2008 population of 44 million, are now formally benefit recipients, although in practice the money is spread between many more family members. Certainly, the general effect is to make unemployment more bearable. Between 1993 and 2006 the percentage of the unemployed living in households with no connection to the labour market rose from 20 to 38 per cent. In other words, the extension of welfare has seen the consolidation of nearly two-fifths of the population into workless dependency at the base of society.

A new elite

At the same time the ANC government has energetically promoted Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), a form of crony capitalism which has seen politically well-connected blacks take shares in predominantly white-owned and managed businesses, producing many instant millionaires. This policy, together with a determined push for affirmative action in every sphere, has seen the creation of a burgeoning though mainly parasitic black bourgeoisie, largely devoid of real professional or entrepreneurial skills, owing its good fortune almost entirely to companies and institutions created by others. The new rich live in a completely unreal world, enjoying the external material symbols of wealth and success—driving Mercs, living in stylish mansions, owning farms and employing servants—and often flitting from job to job, their 'success' guaranteed essentially by skin colour, so that many of them have come to believe that they are true Renaissance men and women, capable of running businesses and universities, or acting as Africanist philosopher-kings or queens. Their lifestyles are modelled on those of the old white rich; but whereas apartheid made the latter virtual outcasts in international society, their black successors enjoy, temporarily, universal currency. It is an odd, hollow and doubtless unsustainable world, in which the full gamut of Fanonist psychological stereotypes is on garish display.

This new black bourgeoisie was both the chief beneficiary and the driving force behind the Mbeki presidency, for all the latter's predilection for

Marxist-Leninist talk. Mbeki always justified his policies by reference to the National Democratic Revolution—a sort of Third World NEP—thus wrong-footing his opponents on the left, the SACP and its allies in the Congress of South African Trade Unions, who could only demand a more radical form of NDR. The actual result of the Mandela and Mbeki presidencies was a sharp increase in inequality in what had been, to start with, one of the most unequal societies in the world. In 1995, a year after the advent of democracy, when there was much heady talk of greater equality, the Gini coefficient measuring income distribution stood at 0.64. By 2005 this had risen to 0.69. Studies show that, whereas in the past black–white differences were the principal component of inequality, these have now narrowed considerably but have in turn been overtaken by widening gulfs within the black population.

To understand what is happening, look at the 2006 BEE deal done by Impala Platinum, the world's second biggest platinum producer. A large slice went, on favourable terms, to Mmakau Mining, founded and run by Bridgette Radebe, wife of the cabinet minister, Jeff Radebe. Bridgette was an influential figure in both government and mining circles, heading the Junior and Small Scale Mining Committee, and was also in charge of the state-owned (and loss-making) diamond mine, Alexkor. (When Bridgette took over Alexkor in 1999, the mine fell under the supervision of her husband Jeff, then Minister for Public Enterprises.¹) Only a month after the Impala deal, Anglo Platinum announced a similar deal with Bridgette's brother, Patrice Motsepe, head of African Rainbow Minerals. Despite all the talk of giving economic power to the African masses, the two biggest platinum companies had concentrated their deals on just one already privileged family (for Patrice and Bridgette are the children of a Tswana princess). Moreover, Bridgette is also the sister-in-law of another BEE mogul, Cyril Ramaphosa, giving that family a degree of financial and political influence rivalling that of the Oppenheimers. Ramaphosa—a former ANC secretary general, and number two on the party's list behind Mandela in the 1994 election—was repeatedly spoken of as a presidential candidate, while Tokyo Sexwale, the former ANC premier of Gauteng province, who had become one of the richest men in the country, did in fact make a belated bid for the presidency.

¹ When the mine finally collapsed it was largely because Jeff Radebe, in a classic case of ham-handed state intervention, forced the management to take redundant workers back onto its payroll, creating a wage bill it could not afford.

Such BEE moguls are expected to contribute heavily to ANC funds and to be helpful to the president. Moreover, since their new-found wealth so clearly derives from political sources, the moguls must stay within a closed circle at the top of the ANC: thus both Ramaphosa and Sexwale remained on the ANC national executive. When one further considers that the minister who pushed through the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act that forced BEE deals on the mining companies, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, is married to Bulelani Ngcuka, then the Director of Public Prosecutions, a key Mbeki confidant and later himself a major BEE beneficiary, one begins to grasp how, behind the rhetoric of 'power to the people', real control is now more tightly guarded by the new ruling class than ever before in South Africa's history. For while, under white rule, the Afrikaner nationalist elite had often inter-married and sometimes felt like one big family, economic power was always primarily held by an English-speaking, and often Jewish, business elite. Under ANC rule, political and economic powers have been consolidated in the same tiny group, while each new deal that further enriches this clique is greeted as a step towards 'democratizing the economy'. Better still, black moguls frequently warn that unless there are ever more such BEE deals, there will be 'social revolution'—the sheerest chutzpah.

There is little doubt what lies at the end of this road. If one takes the five states of Southern Africa that won independence through armed struggle against white rule by revolutionary movements strongly influenced by Marxism-Leninism, one finds that Armando Guebuza, the president of Mozambique, is also that country's richest businessman. Angola has been ruled for the last 30 years by José Eduardo dos Santos, not only Angola's richest man but the second richest man in Brazil (i.e. offshore Angola). Robert Mugabe and Sam Nujoma, the founding presidents of their countries, are undoubtedly the richest men in Zimbabwe and Namibia respectively. South Africa is a relative latecomer, but there is no doubt that Nelson Mandela is a rich man with many beautiful houses, married to the independently wealthy Graça Machel—who has taken full advantage of BEE opportunities in South Africa, despite being a foreigner there. Mandela's prison comrade, Walter Sisulu, died a poor man, but his children are now immensely wealthy. Similarly, Govan Mbeki, a hard-line Stalinist, died poor, but no one doubts that his son, Thabo, the former president, is a rich man. All these states have evolved effortlessly

towards plutocracy while wrapping themselves in the hammer-and-sickle and mouthing leftist rhetoric.

Coalition of the wounded

When, in 1997, Mandela selected Jacob Zuma as ANC Deputy President, there was no reason to see him as ideologically distinct from the new President, his long-time ally and companion Thabo Mbeki. The most striking thing about Zuma was that, almost alone in the ANC's upper echelons, he lacked formal education and had strong peasant origins. For Mandela, who always weighed the importance of such things, the key was that Zuma was a Zulu, that Zulus are the largest ethnic group in South Africa and that the ANC had been led by Xhosas—Mandela, Tambo, Mbeki—for nearly forty years. Such considerations of ethnic balance were always mocked by Mbeki and the younger generation, who insisted that tribalism was largely a construct of apartheid. More immediately, Mbeki was also a paranoiac, mortally suspicious of anyone who could possibly be a rival, and prone to taking stealthy steps to dispose of them. Sure enough, within months of acceding to high office Zuma found himself stripped of almost all functions and soon learnt that he was under police investigation—unthinkable unless Mbeki had ordered it.

These measures intensified as Mbeki's support collapsed. In the 1999 general election he had trounced the opposition Democratic Alliance, winning nearly 67 per cent of the vote compared to the DA's 9.6 per cent. By 2001, opinion polls put support for Mbeki at only 42 per cent, compared to 28 per cent for the DA's Tony Leon. A campaign was immediately launched to destabilize the DA: computer thefts, spying, false accusations and the like. Simultaneously all Mbeki's main rivals—Ramaphosa, Sexwale and Mathews Phosa—found themselves accused of trying to help topple Mbeki with the aid of the CIA and MI5. Zuma too was accused, and had to go on TV to humiliate himself by begging Mbeki's pardon. To no avail: Zuma's associates were tried and jailed, a honey-trap 'rape' case was manufactured against him, and he was finally forced out of the deputy presidency as Mbeki sought to extend his own power indefinitely.

Mbeki, still encased in the Stalinist culture of exile, had fatally mistaken his man—and the local political culture. South Africa has known representative democracy—however racially restricted—since 1854, and

it has a free press. It has never known presidents-for-life and the anti-apartheid struggle was hardly fought for that objective. And Zuma, a proud Zulu, would never bend the knee. Indignant at the way he had been persecuted and cast out, he set his sights on the presidency and would accept no threat or blandishment in its place. Zuma thus found himself naturally in sympathy with the forces of left opposition, principally the SACP and Cosatu. Formally they constituted a Tripartite Alliance with the ANC—an arrangement intended to ensure Communist control, for the relationship between SACP and Cosatu is much the same as that of the French Communist Party and the CGT, with all key union leaders also in the SACP. In 1996 this layer had been mortally affronted when Mbeki launched the Growth, Employment and Redistribution programme without consultation. GEAR promised all manner of things, but at its heart was a fiscal and monetary orthodoxy likely to please the World Bank/IMF and thus remove the need for South Africa to have to borrow from them. But the SACP and Cosatu could never accept their exclusion from economic policy-making which GEAR symbolized, and thus contested it from the start, referring to it as the '1996 class project' and insisting that it represented a 70/30 solution—an alliance between black and white capital, together constituting 30 per cent of the population, ranged against the 70 per cent of the poor and excluded. The whole status of the SACP and Cosatu as co-equals in the liberation struggle was under threat. Their bitterness was shared by many individuals, sidelined by Mbeki for various reasons. Collectively all such figures rallied round Zuma, the most egregious victim of Mbeki's paranoia: hence the so-called 'coalition of the wounded'.

Zuma had happily gone along with GEAR while in government but, as he found himself first under threat and then, in 2005, sacked as Deputy President, he appeared at more and more SACP and Cosatu meetings, where he was greeted as a tribune of the people against an increasingly remote and unpopular government. Zuma, well aware that Cosatu's 1.8 million members and its disciplined core of activists make it the key force in pulling out the ANC vote at election time, was happy to accept SACP and Cosatu support; but he was careful never to risk accusations of disloyalty to the ANC by attacking Mbeki or government policy, restricting himself to motherhood-and-apple-pie banalities. Nonetheless, the bond between Zuma and his allies on the left was forged over several years in the wilderness and was mutually beneficial: on the one hand Zuma could not hope to topple Mbeki without their help; on the other, the

long campaign against Mbeki allowed the SACP to increase its influence greatly. The SACP, once largely the preserve of white Jewish intellectuals, had in exile and underground come to have a notably Zulu tinge, and it did not escape notice that its current leader, Blade Nzimande, is a Zulu bound to Zuma by ties of sentiment as well as ideology.

Both these traits were on display in the run-up to the ANC's National Conference at Polokwane in December 2007. Mbeki, with deep unwisdom, decided to ignore the emphatic view of the party's National General Council in 2005 and to insist on his own candidacy for a yet further term as the party's President—universally seen as an attempt to remain in power, by hook or by crook. Had he made way gracefully it is possible that another and more popular anti-Zuma candidate might have emerged, but Mbeki banked everything on being able to use incumbency and presidential patronage to achieve his ends. One result was the increasing consolidation of a Zulu bloc vote behind Zuma. Everywhere in KwaZulu-Natal one could hear that 'now is our time', that Zulus had waited patiently to re-assume the leadership of what they still thought of as Chief Luthuli's party, and that Mbeki's attempt to extend the already overlong Xhosa ascendancy not only broke an explicit commitment to alternation but was exactly what one would expect of a tricky Xhosa. Opinion polls suggested that Zuma could capture much of the Inkatha vote in the province, as well as that of the ANC, in a tidal wave of Zulu nationalism which could bring a summary end to Chief Buthelezi's long career. Meanwhile, both within KwaZulu-Natal and elsewhere, Cosatu and the SACP worked tirelessly to recruit and push their own activists into ANC branches and federations, men and women solidly committed to Zuma. This was what Zwelinzima Vavi, the Cosatu leader, meant when he talked of the Zuma cause as 'an unstoppable tsunami'.

When this wave duly broke over Mbeki at Polokwane it amounted to an effective vote of no confidence in the bulk of the ANC political class that had ruled the country since 1994. Not only was Mbeki beaten by more than 60–40, but the whole executive team behind him was thrown out too. Neither the Party Chairman, Terror Lekota, nor Mbeki's Deputy President, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, could even get elected to the 86-strong National Executive Committee. Also thrown off the NEC were fifteen cabinet ministers, ten deputy ministers, all members of Mbeki's office, ten MPs and eight of the nine provincial premiers—the ninth surviving only because he gave a promise of early retirement. Onto the

National Executive rode large numbers of obscure provincial militants. 'I was in the struggle for many years, but I don't even know most of these people', a bewildered Lekota told me. To a not inconsiderable extent this was an SACP–Cosatu takeover, symbolized by the fact that the SACP Chairman, Gwede Mantashe, became the new ANC Secretary General and chief spokesman. At Zuma's wish, Mbeki was allowed to continue in office. But irritation with him mounted as it became clear that there would be no halt to his guerrilla warfare against Zuma; the end came in September 2008 when he was ignominiously forced out, temporarily replaced by Kgalema Motlanthe, an old SACP militant who had headed the mineworkers' union, in the run-up to the April 2009 election.

The corruption charges against Zuma—finally dropped in April 2009—were never likely to have prevented him from becoming president. In effect most ANC members assume their leaders have their hand in the till, regard this as normal and thus cannot see why Zuma should be singled out. He is a genial and likeable man, comfortable in his own skin, and was well aware that he could not afford to give hostages to fortune before being elected. His presidency will see an old-style Communist Party assume unparalleled influence and authority in a major state for the first time in many decades. Zuma, like Mbeki, was long an SACP member himself and owes most of his political formation to the Party, but he is also aware that less than 5 per cent of South Africans say they support the SACP. He spent much of the run-up to the election trying to reassure both domestic and international investors that they can confidently invest in South Africa, and that it will be business as usual. At the same time, he frequently sounds like the rural populist he is: disciplinarian, homophobic, wanting to crack down hard on crime and teenage pregnancies, tending to favour the death penalty, and feeling that somehow the ANC has failed rural blacks and that 'something' must be done for them. He understands little about economics and is far happier belting out struggle songs on party stages than making serious speeches. He is a listener, a man who knows what he does not know, keen to hear all sides before he summarizes the consensus view. But that simply increases the significance of those who get to sit round the table with him.

Leftward shift?

Will the new Zuma administration see a decisive shift to the left? After the ANC's predictable landslide on 22 April 2009, winning 264 out of

400 seats, there is no doubt that the SACP regards this as a now-or-never opportunity. In terms of the old Leninist model, the Party's role was to set itself up as the vanguard of the national liberation movement, to recruit the leading nationalists to its cause and then, after liberation, to carry the revolution through to a triumphant socialist conclusion. Elsewhere in the Third World, this strategy succeeded only in the context of the Second World War—even the belated Communist triumph in Indochina owed its success largely to that. In South Africa, alone in the postwar period, the model appeared to be working perfectly. The SACP recruited Mandela, Sisulu and virtually the whole of the next generation. It led the armed struggle and became the ANC's thinking brain, its ideas permeating the movement as a whole, so that even non-Communist ANC activists tend to revere Cuba and dream of emulating Hugo Chávez's Bolivarian experiment in Africa.

The SACP entered the democratic era equipped not only with those advantages but with a charismatic leader, Chris Hani, who had played a key role in the armed struggle and was second only to Mandela in popularity. Hani was clearly poised to assume the post-Mandela leadership when he was gunned down in 1993, in an assassination which the Party tried, unsuccessfully, to link to Mbeki, for whom it opened the road to power. It often seemed that the SACP would never recover from that hammer blow—until Mbeki fatally overreached himself by sacking Zuma and thus gave the Party a providential opportunity to regain its old, dominant role. To a considerable extent the split in the ANC, and the founding of the new Congress of the People (COPE), is a reaction to the perceived takeover of the ANC by the SACP. Even many who have remained within the ANC are deeply queasy about the way in which Nzimande, Vavi and Mantashe have become the new men of power in the party. In the run-up to the election Mantashe made full use of his powers as ANC Secretary General, purging anyone suspected of COPE sympathies and pushing reliable Communists into key positions. The votes cast by ANC branches or federations for this or that candidate were simply ignored in this quest for ideological purity. As a result, the SACP has significantly enlarged its weight within the ANC parliamentary caucus. Before the election, Mantashe had even insisted that the new government would be answerable to the SACP, with ineffective ministers held to account and fired by the Party if need be. He and Nzimande speak ceaselessly of the importance of establishing 'working-class hegemony' over every sphere of national life which, in practice, means SACP control.

This is not Zuma's vision. Although he likes to speak of himself as a worker, he is a Zulu patriarch at heart and wants to go with what works. He will surround himself not just with SACP and Cosatu activists but with a Durban-centred clique of ANC Zulus, together with Indians and whites from the Durban commercial world. Zuma is also well aware that he takes power as a figure widely vilified by the media and that he must quickly reach out towards this constituency if he is to win over any of the key opinion-makers. The SACP and Cosatu will go along with this provided they feel their power is now built in. Thus they went quietly along with the 2009 budget announced by Finance Minister Trevor Manuel, much though they dislike him, both because they were able to draw up economic policy at a preceding 'Alliance Summit' and because they feel they will get rid of Manuel in time. The key is that they will now be included in the inner circles of power, a position they will not lightly surrender.

The gravitational pull to the left lies not just in the strength of SACP influence but in the processes by which the ANC and SACP developed as a revolutionary movement, during their long exile between 1962 and 1990, with a strong appeal to South Africa's poor and dispossessed. Enormous promises were made, millennial expectations were aroused, the movement developing its own martyrs, rhetoric and mystique—and then the apartheid government turned round, invited the exiles back and handed over power to them under a liberal constitution, thus robbing them of the revolution. Since the movement had never actually looked like overthrowing the apartheid government, this historic compromise was eagerly grasped. But as the disappointments, blunders and corruption of ANC governments accumulate, there is a natural tendency to hark back to the unfulfilled promise of this tradition, or even to pretend that a revolution has been achieved and that now it must be defended.

The left's programme is somewhat vague. It calls for a 'developmental state', with the centre playing a far greater economic role both in terms of investment and intervention. There is an insistent demand for protectionism, particularly for the textile and motor industries, and for an industrial policy which will nurture new manufacturing sectors behind tariff walls. The SACP has spoken of nationalizing the oil company, Sasol, and also demands that the major banks cede a larger share of their equity to BEE partners. The left is also angry that less than 7 per cent of white commercial farms have been handed over to black ownership, and calls for five times that number to be transferred in the

next five years, with the abandonment of a 'willing seller, willing buyer' model for large-scale expropriation. Jeff Radebe, a key Zuma henchman, even talks of kibbutz-style collective farms and agri-villages, with hordes of new peasant farmers trained and equipped by the state.

In fact the room for a decisive move to the left is almost non-existent. The two key statistics are firstly that, while 13.5 million South Africans receive welfare grants, only 5.4 million pay income tax, a very high proportion of them white, Coloured and Asian. Forceful redistributive measures will undoubtedly push many of the latter into emigration, thus worsening the skills shortage and narrowing the tax base to a point where the whole welfare state could collapse. The second statistic is that South Africa is running a current-account deficit of 7.4 per cent of GDP, one of the highest in the world. To fund it there has to be a recurrent annual inflow of at least \$20 billion from foreign investors. Should the left take measures which frighten those investors away, the result would be an immediate economic meltdown. In addition, the period since 1994 has seen a sweeping internationalization of the South African economy. Many big companies are now predominantly owned abroad and have also moved their headquarters there. The left may still think in terms of national autarchy, but this is increasingly at odds with reality. Sasol, the country's largest industrial company, now has assets all over the world and doubtless, in the event of nationalization, these would simply escape the state's grab.

Outlook

To some extent a 'developmental state' is emerging anyway because of previously planned massive infrastructural investment. But much of this is due simply to the fact that the state has allowed the energy and transport infrastructure to deteriorate badly and now has to bunch expenditure to catch up. Whether the Zuma government will actually be able to borrow the sums required, in the midst of an international credit crunch, remains to be seen. Assuming it can, the results are unlikely to advance the socialist cause. Everything to date suggests that the state machine is incapable of maintaining such investments and that there will be massive leakage of funds due to corruption. All in all, the prospects for the creation of new industries are not good. Wages are too high to compete with Asia, productivity too low to compete with Europe. There is, indeed, a 'missing' manufacturing sector and thus, to

a considerable extent, a missing proletariat—many of Cosatu's members are white-collar workers. For the country suffers from 'Dutch disease': its prodigious mineral wealth and commodity exports push the Rand's value far beyond the level required for the country's manufactures to be internationally competitive. But neither the black nor the white bourgeoisie is in any hurry to see a currency depreciation, which would shoot up the prices of the imports for which they have such an appetite.

Most critical of all is land reform. Nearly all the commercial farms handed over to black communities have slumped back into subsistence agriculture, leading to dramatic losses in food production. At the same time, the threat that they too may lose their farms has seen many commercial farmers hold back from further investment, with ruinous effects. The combined result was that in 2008, for the first time since 1985, South Africa became a net importer of food—something which the already overburdened current account cannot afford. If the left's ambitious plans for land reform are followed there will certainly be a further steep drop in production, resulting in vastly higher food prices and probable starvation among sections of the poor. Agricultural experts are warning that, even with sufficient food production, the deterioration of both the rail network and rural roads is such that 35 per cent of the population are now at risk of malnourishment, due to the difficulties of getting food to them. The situation is exacerbated by the millions of Zimbabwean, Congolese and other refugees who have poured into South Africa due to the collapse in border controls. Rising unemployment, let alone serious food shortages, could see a recrudescence of the xenophobic riots which cost over 60 lives in early 2008. Already 1.5 million children are malnourished as a result of chronic food insecurity.

The prospect of a Zuma government presiding over rising unemployment, xenophobic riots and mass starvation bears no relationship, of course, to the ANC's foundational document, the Freedom Charter. It is only too likely that the response will be to concentrate on forcing yet further BEE schemes on the banks and other companies, so as to enrich a further tranche of the politically well-connected. The problem is that the ANC and SACP have not lived up to their non-racial promise and have accepted far too many of the premises of Mbeki's racial nationalism. All that this has achieved is to make the remaining white population more important than ever—without their taxes, their skills and the companies they own and run, the country would collapse. While the better-off flee to

private health, private schools and private security companies, the poor, locked without choice into the state sector, suffer the consequences. The results are declining standards of health, education, a steeply falling life expectancy and mountainous unemployment.

Moreover, as the elections of April 2009 showed, the fragmentation of the ANC has now begun. The breakaway COPE, after only a few months' existence, stole over 1.3 million votes from it and will now provide an alternative focus for black support. Although the ANC won 65.9 per cent, this represented a fall of nearly 4 per cent since 2004 albeit on a higher turnout. Across the country the ANC vote fell, often quite sharply, and only a huge show of Zulu support for Zuma saved the party from greater embarrassment. Meanwhile the liberal Democratic Alliance continued to strengthen its position, winning an extra 1 million votes and trouncing the ANC in the Western Cape. The ANC, which had previously controlled this province, is now in complete disarray in Cape Town, the country's second most important conurbation. More than ever before, the ANC is coming to rely on a straightforward ethnic appeal. Zulus are by far the largest and most cohesive group within the black population. They are well aware that the ANC has had Xhosa leaders ever since taking power and are thrilled that a Zulu has finally taken over.

This is problematic in two ways. First, it is universally accepted that Zuma will be a one-term president—he is 67, and by the end of his term will be 72—but it is highly unlikely that Zulu voters will be prepared to relinquish their grip on the presidency in just five years, so there could be serious internecine strife at that point. Secondly, COPE achieved its best results among the disgruntled Xhosa voters of the Eastern and Northern Cape. The seeds of future ethnic division have been sown and represent a major threat to ANC unity. During the independence era of the 1960s, René Dumont wrote tellingly in his *L'Afrique noire est mal partie* of a 'false start in Africa'. Now, a whole generation later, despite the lessons supposedly learnt and the ANC's heady promises in 1994, there has been a false start of extraordinary proportions in the continent's most developed state.

Left Leanings



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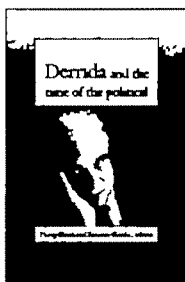
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PATRICK BOND

IN POWER IN PRETORIA?

Reply to R. W. Johnson

IN 'FALSE START in South Africa', R. W. Johnson offers a welcome blast against Pretoria's new crony-capitalist elite, rightly summoning the spirit of Fanon to depict its parasitical mentality. Johnson is a trenchant and highly readable liberal chronicler of South Africa's endless political degeneracy, and his assessment of ANC rule to date hits important targets: the rise of a grasping BEE bourgeoisie, the failure of basic social provision, soaring unemployment and vast inequalities. He is right to warn of possible Zulu-Xhosa tensions, and renewed xenophobia against regional immigrants. Johnson rhetorically exaggerates the importance of white flight—even on his own figures, economically active émigrés represent only 0.5 per cent of the population, and are probably counter-balanced by skilled white returnees, Johnson among them. His fear that the presence of Communists in government will scare away investors seems almost quaint, considering the amount of foreign capital pouring into Beijing. Johnson will say that the CCP are better capitalists than their confrères in the SACP—but that is simply to concede the point. More seriously, though, Johnson provides no explanatory analysis of the ANC's socio-economic failures, nor any apartheid-era baselines against which they might be measured. And in suggesting a lurch to the left under the Zuma government, he totally misconstrues the relationship between the South African Communist Party and the ANC.

Any effective balance sheet of South Africa today must start from an analysis of the 1990–94 transition from apartheid—absent from Johnson's essay here. For it was in the run-up to the handover of power that the conditions for the 'false start' were set in place. Although the political

position of the SACP was then a great deal stronger than it is now, the Party played an essentially subaltern role in establishing the parameters of post-apartheid rule. It was not the liberation movement but South African financial and export-oriented capital and the US-led global economic institutions that were the principal midwives of the new order, while SACP leaders eagerly offered the forceps—and the mass movement of the townships was kept locked outside the delivery room.

By the end of the 1980s the apartheid regime had reached a dead end. Economically, it had long been undermined by chronic over-accumulation in a bunkerized manufacturing sector and by investment boycotts (whether in solidarity with the anti-apartheid movement or through market reluctance to venture into an unstable environment). Militarily it had been worsted by liberation forces in Angola and Namibia. Pretoria was isolated diplomatically and, following the brutal repression of the 1984–86 township uprisings, under increasing pressure from the US Congress and the White House to move towards some form of power-sharing with the black majority. In this situation, the initiative came from white South African financial and mining companies: Anglo American, Old Mutual/Nedcor, Sanlam and others, whose think-tanks helped fuse capitalist interests with the ‘new Nats’ (‘verligtes’), especially Afrikaner business and professional layers, grouped behind De Klerk.

The fraught and fluid situation in early 1990, after De Klerk had ordered Mandela’s release from prison and the unbanning of the ANC and SACP, was powerfully evoked in these pages at the time by John Saul.¹ Behind the Kempton Park talks stood the ever-present menace of the white security apparatus; the murderous chaos unleashed in the townships by Inkatha thugs in the pay of the Minister for Law and Order, with white police and SADF support, created a haze of blood and fear. The options available to the ANC were limited: ‘military victory’ had never been a serious option. Yet the movement now seemed to throw away advantages that would have allowed it to negotiate from a position of greater strength. A call from Mandela for the boycott and international sanctions to be maintained until the ANC’s key conditions were met would have had a powerful resonance. The social turbulence of the townships—rent protests, marches, strikes—could have been given

¹ John Saul, ‘South Africa: Between “Barbarism” and “Structural Reform”’, NLR 1/188, July–August 1991.

direction by a coherent programme for structural reform. Instead, the pressure of international sanctions began to dissipate as soon as 'talks' were under way and, at De Klerk's insistence, the mass movement was demobilized. The SACP was disequipped by its forty years in exile to expand into a genuine mass party—Deputy General Secretary Jeremy Cronin has vividly described the clamour for membership cards at its 100,000-strong launch rally at the huge FMB soccer stadium in Johannesburg, which the Party apparatus had not the wherewithal to meet.³ For its part, the ANC leadership was neither willing nor able to articulate a clear alternative.

Wrongfooted by De Klerk's offensive, programmatically unprepared, the movement's leaders were consigned to a secondary role while the macro-economic fundamentals of the post-apartheid order were hammered out by World Bank officials, who organized over a dozen 'reconnaissance missions' between 1990 and 1994. An interim constitution was drafted behind closed doors, enshrining private property rights and an 'independent' Reserve Bank. ANC leaders pledged to pay the debts of the apartheid regime, some \$25 billion in foreign bank loans and even more from domestic lenders, cutting deep into future social spending. A 1993 IMF loan was conditional upon the new government implementing public-sector wage and spending cuts. Strategies for 'growth through redistribution', developed by the left of the ANC and Cosatu, were brushed aside. Mandela and Mbeki bowed to the demand of the Fund's Managing Director, Michel Camdessus, that the ANC reappoint the apartheid-era Finance Minister and Central Bank Governor when they took office in May 1994.

The same dynamic occurred in all the micro-developmental arenas. One White Paper after another was crafted by the World Bank and its local proxies, such as Anglo American's Urban Foundation think-tank or the Development Bank of Southern Africa. These bodies were crucial in shaping the transition in hotly contested fields like education, health-care, energy and land. Thus water would be priced at 'full-cost recovery' under ANC Minister Kader Asmal, a ruling that generated massive numbers of disconnections, a cholera epidemic, protest riots and illegal reconnections. Housing policy was constructed by SACP Chairman Joe

³ Helena Sheehan, 'Interview with Jeremy Cronin', 2001, available on Dublin City University website.

Slovo in a manner wholly consistent with the World Bank and Urban Foundation philosophy of encouraging private home-ownership. During this period, the main role of the ANC was to shoehorn the more radical Mass Democratic Movement allies into 'coerced harmony' rather than conflict. In 'pacting' exercises organized by Anglo American or Nedcor/Old Mutual, leaders were invited to learn 'about each others' basic objectives and philosophy', and 'how to make concessions so as to "build trust" between negotiating partners'. Scenario-planning sessions explained the dangers of 'macro-economic populism': the model to follow was that of the flamingo and its flock—'take off slowly, fly together'—rather than an Icarus, soaring too high to meet working-class expectations only to come to a bad end.

Johnson is absolutely right, of course, to deplore the glaring inequalities in South Africa today—the Gini coefficient up from an already high 0.64 in 1995 to 0.69 in 2005, unemployment doubling under the ANC to around 40 per cent, if those who have given up looking for work are included. The state's delivery of houses, water, sanitation, electricity, healthcare and education are widely considered either inferior or more expensive than during apartheid. But these outcomes are the result of macro-economic strategies set in place before 1994 by South African capital and the Bretton Woods institutions, aiming to bind the post-apartheid regime to an orthodox structural adjustment programme—and with which, during the crucial transition period, the leaderships of the ANC and SACP effectively concurred. What Johnson calls for—in essence: policies favoured by foreign investors—only amounts to a reiteration of the IMF programme to which ANC-ruled South Africa has been committed from the start.

Mandela–Mbeki record

If anything, these policies have been intensified by ANC governments since 1994. The GATT agreement signed that year slashed protective tariffs for South African manufacturing—in line with the 'post-Fordist' thinkers of Cosatu's Industrial Strategy Project, while decimating the trade-union movement's base. In 1995, capital controls were lifted with the dissolution of the dual exchange-control system, a 'financial rand' used to deter capital flight during the prior decade. The invitation to international finance to help itself to quick profits brought, first, a huge

inflow of hot money and then, in February 1996, dramatic outflows and a currency crash of nearly 20 per cent—a pattern that would repeat itself four times in subsequent years, while successive Reserve Bank governors continued to loosen exchange controls. In 1999 Finance Minister Trevor Manuel allowed domestic capital to flood out when he gave permission for the relisting of financial headquarters for most of South Africa's largest companies on the London Stock Exchange. Firms that permanently moved their apartheid-era loot offshore included Anglo American, DeBeers, BHP Billiton, Investec, Liberty Life, Old Mutual, Didata ICT, South African Breweries, Mondi and several others. Johnson's claim that any measures which might 'frighten investors away' would bring 'an immediate economic meltdown' overlooks both the extent of this plunder and the damage already caused by hot money. As shown by Malaysia in 1998 or Argentina in 2002, the strategic imposition of exchange controls and, if necessary, a default on unrepayable or illegitimate debt can address the problem of capital flight and bring a resumption of growth.

ANC tax policy has been extraordinarily regressive. Corporation tax was steadily lowered from a rate of nearly 50 per cent in the early 1990s to less than 30 per cent today. When Johnson claims that 'while 13.5 million South Africans receive welfare grants, only 5.4 million pay income tax', he forgets the tens of millions who pay a 14 per cent Value Added Tax and other indirect taxes, comprising about a third of the budget. (Nor can the redistributive crumbs of national social grants, mostly in the region of \$25 per month, be seriously considered an incentive to avoid work.) By 2003, even the editor of *Business Day* could protest: 'The government is utterly seduced by big business, and cannot see beyond its immediate interests.'³

The ANC's project—technocratic neoliberalism, combined with patronage-inflected resource flows from the state's numerous white-elephant projects and Black Economic Empowerment deals—has exacerbated the sectoral distortions of the South African economy over the past fifteen years. Manufacturing has declined as a percentage of GDP, with labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, footwear and gold mining shrinking by up to 5 per cent per year. Due to South

³ Peter Bruce, 'The Thick End of the Wedge', *Business Day*, 4 June 2003.

Africa's sustained overaccumulation problem, manufacturing-capacity utilization remained around 80 per cent during the early 2000s, and private gross fixed-capital formation was a meagre 15–17 per cent in the decade following 1994. From 2002 to 2007, rising export-commodity prices combined with speculative bubbles in real estate, finance, insurance and communications to create growth rates of around 5 per cent. Their fragility may be judged by the scale of the property bubble, which sent house prices up by a world-record 400 per cent, compared to 100 per cent in the US and 200 per cent in Ireland; meanwhile share prices on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange rose by 50 per cent. Where the government has backed infrastructural investment, amid claims of constructing a 'developmental state', the aim has not been meeting real social needs but a series of vast white elephants—bloated soccer stadiums for the 2010 World Cup, mega-dams in the Lesotho highlands, a \$2.2 billion fast-rail service for business travellers, nuclear reactors, a \$5 billion arms deal—all notoriously larded with kickbacks.

Though Johnson rightly rails at the levels of corruption that have accompanied this, when it comes to South Africa's new President his growl turns to a purr. Zuma's record is indefensible. Until the National Prosecuting Authority controversially dropped its case against him in April 2009, a week before the election, Zuma faced scores of charges of bribery and corruption, dating back to the late 1990s when he was provincial Economics Minister in KwaZulu-Natal. One incident in 2000—in which prosecutors alleged that a French arms dealer bought protection from bribery investigations with an annual \$55,000 gift to Zuma—was crucial in the trial of the latter's 'financial advisor', Schabir Shaik, whose 'loans' (as Zuma termed them) to keep the huge multi-household Zuma clan in style amounted to \$440,000 over several years. Jailed in 2005, at the same time that Zuma was fired as South Africa's Deputy President, Shaik was released in March 2009 thanks to a claimed terminal illness, widely understood as faked. Numerous other allegations of arms deal crookedness have tainted allies of both Zuma and Mbeki. The latter took extreme steps in 2007–08 to protect the former South African Police chief (and Interpol president) Jackie Selebi from prosecution on charges of consorting with the mafia. Several other leading state officials' resignations have followed corruption allegations in recent months. Overall, the impression is that South

Africa's liberation movement has become almost as ethically degraded as its neighbour's just to the north.⁴

Left bluster?

The strategy of SACP and Cosatu militants within the Tripartite Alliance has long been: 'talk left'—to their township base—and 'walk right', with the government. The discourse–reality gap is not solely South African, nor is it just the legacy of the three-decade struggle against apartheid—fifteen years on, it shows no sign of waning. The combination of liberation rhetoric and a raucously free press, swingeing attacks and outraged rebuttals, help to make up South Africa's unique political culture. But deeds are rarely a match for words. Johnson warns that Gwede Mantashe, ANC General Secretary and SACP chairman, speaks 'ceaselessly of the need to establish "working-class hegemony" over every sphere of national life'—but when 2,000 metalworkers marched against the Reserve Bank in late May 2009, demanding a 2 per cent cut in interest rates (they got 1 per cent), it was Mantashe who lambasted them for 'unhelpful' activism. Zuma famously likes to sing *Umshini wami*, but the effect is sentimental, a reminder to his constituents of a time when leading ANC politicians really were revolutionaries, rather than elites for whom dirigiste policies represent not a road to 'African socialism' but a short cut to crony capitalism. The comment of an international banker back in 1980—'It is a political pattern that Mugabe gives radical, anti-business speeches before government makes major pro-business decisions or announcements'—could equally apply here.⁵

Less often remarked is the fact that such rhetoric reaches its height when defending government policy against criticism from the left. Mbeki and his ANC Political Education Unit applied the same brand of hysterical paranoia that fuelled their AIDS denialism to attacking trade-unionist and Communist critics within the Alliance, as well as the independent left. The fury of their onslaughts rose with the scale of mass mobilizations

⁴ Some—partially—countervailing evidence: when a leading sponsor of Zuma's Durban partying life, businessman Roy Moodley, tried to improve his seating at the May 9 inauguration with a \$12 bribe, the police locked him up in jail overnight until he paid \$240 bail; Zuma's people still allowed him his seat at Union Buildings.

⁵ Cited in Joseph Hanlon, 'Destabilization and the Battle to Reduce Dependence', in Colin Stoneman, ed., *Zimbabwe's Prospects*, London 1988, p. 35.

in the early 2000s, with the President railing at an ANC policy conference that 'domestic and foreign left sectarian factions' were subjecting the movement to 'sustained attack', while Mbeki loyalists Jabu Moleketi and Josiah Jele bayed about the 'adventurist and provocative' agenda of a new left that aimed 'to defeat the democratic revolution and transform our country into a client state'.⁶ As Cosatu spokespeople Oupa Bodibe, Patrick Craven and Vukani Mde replied to them, 'Why confuse everybody, by wrapping up the argument in pseudo-Marxist mumbo-jumbo about "revolutionary democracy", irrelevant passages from Marx and Lenin and wild conspiracy theories? Why not simply say: "We believe capitalism is the best policy for the ANC government to adopt"?'

To the extent that Johnson advances an explanation for South Africa's crony-capitalist path, it is essentially a culturalist one: 'the effortless evolution towards plutocracy' by former Marxist-Leninist liberation-struggle leaders in Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, Zimbabwe; now South Africa too. A serious comparative analysis of these developments is badly needed, but it would require a careful assessment of a range of factors and agents: legacies of colonial regimes, patterns of economic development, formation of anti-colonial leaderships, role of external interventions, and so forth. In the absence of this, Johnson's account cannot explain why the worst offender, Mugabe, was never a man of the left, while Mbeki, Stalinist to the core, was ousted without a drop of blood being spilt: first removed as head of the ANC in December 2007, and then from state power in September 2008.⁷

⁶ See Thabo Mbeki, 'Statement at the ANC Policy Conference', Kempton Park, 27 September 2002; Jabu Moleketi and Josiah Jele, 'Two Strategies of the National Liberation Movement in the Struggle for the Victory of the National Democratic Revolution', ANC discussion document, Johannesburg, October 2002, p. 1. The hoary fetish of the 'National Democratic Revolution' is itself an obstacle to coherent thinking—as if a perspective coined in 1920 for the premodern tribal orders of Soviet Central Asia could have any relevance for South Africa's urbanized mass capitalist democracy.

⁷ A large group of loyalists departed with him, including Trade Minister Alec Erwin, the brothers Essop and Aziz Pahad (close confidants and hatchetmen of Mbeki in exile), Intelligence Minister Ronnie Kasrils, Local Government Minister Sydney Mufamadi, Public Service Minister Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi and her husband, Deputy Finance Minister Jabu Moleketi. The new Mbeki-ite electoral machine, Congress of the People (COPE), is led by former Defence Minister and ANC Chairman Terror Lekota, former Cosatu General Secretary Mbhazima Shilowa, Mbeki's former Chief of Staff Smuts Ngonyama, former anti-apartheid church leader Alan Boesak, former NEPAD head Wiseman Nkhulu, former SACP treasurer Phillip Dexter and former Cosatu President Willie Madisha.

A vital element here is the role of a combative mass movement which, along with an independent press, can be a powerful check on plutocratic leaders. In the South African case, the role of the Alliance left, SACP and Cosatu, in organizing against Mbeki at ANC branch and district level—culminating in Zuma's triumph at Polokwane—is well known. The larger issue is how, in the process, popular protests around water, jobs, housing and living standards were diverted into a fight against Mbeki, rather than Mbekism—the system as a whole. Why does the left remain shackled to the ANC leadership, when South Africa's pure PR electoral system offers it a good chance of independent representation—probably comparable to the cente-right Democratic Alliance's 16 per cent—on a platform that would undoubtedly resonate with important sectors of the population? Opportunities for power and patronage assuredly play a role. The SACP and Cosatu are so far relatively untainted by systemic corruption, though cynics might posit that this is mainly due to their marginalization during the Mbeki era.⁸ Hopes for, or illusions of, political influence play a far more central part. The ANC leadership has nurtured these over the years by installing a handful of Cosatu and SACP leaders in junior ministerial positions, and by responding to the SACP's perpetual call for 'consultation and discussion' with a series of 'Alliance summits'.

The first of these get-togethers was held to deflect rank and file outrage at the ANC government's 1996 GEAR programme, which abandoned previous declarations of radical redistributive intent for a forthright embrace of free-market policies; as a former editor of *Umsebenzi* has documented, they have since become an established feature of South African political life. After lengthy theoretical debates, 'the SACP always being the most garrulous', Alliance summits characteristically end with ringing assertions of unity, verbal assurances from the ANC leadership that 'macro-economic policy is not cast in stone', and 'a reminder to their allies that the severe "constraints" they faced in government would require patience and political maturity'.⁹ Over the past ten years, SACP

⁸ Allegations by former SACP treasurer Phillip Dexter and Cosatu's ex-president Willie Madisha about abuse of credit cards and business donations—including a tycoon's purported \$50,000 donation in a black plastic bag to Nzimande in 2002—have so far failed to stick, though both Dexter and Madisha, now in COPE, continue to use their insider knowledge to slate the SACP and Cosatu for what they decry as unethical financing.

⁹ Dale McKinley, 'Democracy, Power and Patronage: Debate and Opposition within the ANC and the Tripartite Alliance since 1994', Opposition in South Africa's New Democracy conference papers, Eastern Cape, June 2000.

leaders have repeatedly reiterated the Party line—a break with the Alliance would be ‘tantamount to handing our victory back to apartheid and neo-apartheid forces’—while calling for yet more discussion: ‘the crux of the problem, as far as the SACP is concerned, is a lack of viable and efficient Alliance structures for effective consultations’.¹⁰

This pattern looks set to continue under the Zuma government. While strategic decision-making remains in the hands of Trevor Manuel as head of the National Planning Commission, Nzimande has been appointed Minister for Higher Education and SACP economist Rob Davies, Minister of Trade and Industry.¹¹ Other Party notables migrating from long parliamentary careers to deputy ministries are the chief ideologue, Jeremy Cronin, to Transport, and Yunus Carrim, to Local Government. Three obvious omissions, though, are the two Mbeki-era left-leaning junior ministers, Pallo Jordan and Zola Skweyiya, and the former Deputy Health Minister, Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, fired by Mbeki for opposing AIDS-denialist policies in 2007, enthusiastically defended by the SACP and health activists, but subsequently dropped from Zuma’s list.

Overall, Zuma’s cabinet seems to offer the Alliance left sufficient career concessions, but no real prospects for expanding a power base to challenge the status quo. Any influence will only be felt locally and sporadically. In the main policy shift leftwards—national health insurance proposals, which will be watered down in coming weeks—the drivers are ANC health professionals, not communists. Nzimande’s call to arms in *Umsebenzi Online* a few days before the inauguration, asserting that ‘this time around’, the SACP ‘will not allow itself to be used as a stepping stone to positions in the ANC and government only to be abandoned by some of those cadres once they occupy such positions’, reveals a knowing cynicism about South Africa’s party-patronage system, but is all too likely to be disproved.¹²

¹⁰ Blade Nzimande, ‘The Role of the SACP in the Alliance’, *The African Communist* 150, 1 January 1999, quoted in McKinley, p. 74.

¹¹ Writing in the SACP e-journal *Umsebenzi Online* on 7 May 2009, Nzimande dismissed the growing left critique of university commercialization and repression as merely a ‘strident voice on asserting of academic freedom in institutions of higher education, but silent on the need to transform the colonial type production and reproduction of knowledge in those institutions’.

¹² Nzimande, *Umsebenzi Online*, 7 May 2009.

Continuity seems assured on the macro-economic front. Alongside Manuel—whose new ministerial position within the President's office is seen as a promotion of sorts from Finance—economic development policy is to be championed by Ebrahim Patel, *ex*-secretary of the clothing and textile-workers' union and a leading advocate of corporatism within Cosatu. The new Finance Minister is Pravin Gordhan, a former tax commissioner and long-time Zuma associate, hailed by the *Financial Times* for his 'formidable reputation in business circles'. There is no reason to doubt Zuma's repeated assurances to financial institutions and Davos audiences that 'nothing will change' in terms of pro-business policies, no matter their effect on the mass of South Africans.

Economic crisis

How severe are these effects likely to be? Going into the Zuma era, South Africa is the world's most economically vulnerable emerging market, according to the *Economist*.³ For the first quarter of 2009, government data show a 6.4 per cent decline in GDP, the worst since 1984. By the end of 2008 it was already apparent that labour would suffer deep retrenchments, with a 67 per cent reduction in average hours per factory worker, the worst decline since 1970. The economy is likely to shed a half-million jobs in 2009, especially in manufacturing and mining. January 2009 alone witnessed a 36 per cent fall in new car sales and a 50 per cent production cut, the worst ever recorded. The anticipated rise in port activity has also reversed, with a 29 per cent annualized fall reported in early 2009. At the same time, house repossession has increased by 52 per cent since early 2008.

The impending austerity regime was already envisaged in the IMF's October 2008 Article IV Consultation, which called for spending cuts to bring the public-sector borrowing requirement to zero, plus inflation-targeting through interest-rate rises, which would have a devastating effect on household debt.⁴ But the Zuma government is likely to be caught in a pincer movement between pressures from above and those from below—and the members of the Alliance left in his government

³ The alleged order of riskiness is South Africa, Hungary, Poland, South Korea, Mexico, Pakistan, Brazil, Turkey, Russia, Argentina, Venezuela, Indonesia, Thailand, India, Taiwan, Malaysia and China. 'Domino Theory', *Economist*, 26 Feb 2009.

⁴ IMF, 'IMF Executive Board Concludes Article IV Consultation with South Africa', 22 October 2008.

still more so. The rank and file worked very hard for Zuma's victory and a rightward shift will be commensurately demoralizing. Job losses, rising conflict over transport restructuring, and huge electricity-price increases are certain flashpoints. The level of protest per capita in South Africa is second only to China: between 2004 and 2007, police counted more than 30,000 'gatherings', of 15 or more people in some form of protest; according to a recent survey, many more spontaneous outbursts were not recorded.¹⁵ The economic crisis will intensify the contradictions for the Alliance left of operating within a neoliberal project; the next stage could see growing repression—Zuma was, after all, first and foremost a military man during his underground career. Whether this means that sections of the left will finally consider breaking with the ANC to a new party that might contest for state power over the next decade, remains to be seen.

In their May 2006 *Bua Komanisi!* statement, the SACP published an interesting critique of the ANC's trajectory under Mbeki:

In order to carry forward the capitalist-driven growth path project, the leading cadre within the ANC state have appreciated the need to forge a powerful political-technical-managerial centre within the state, focused around the presidency with close ties to key departments, notably Treasury and Trade and Industry . . . Given the assumption that we are embarked upon a new global era, and that modernizing alignment with 'international best practice' is the holy grail, then the second pillar of the project follows logically. It has sought to build a strong presidential centre within the state, in which the leading cadre is made up of a new political elite (state managers and technocratically inclined ministers) and (often overlapping with them) a new generation of black private sector Black Economic Empowerment managers/capitalists . . . The third major pillar of this post-1996 state project, and again it follows logically, is the organizational 'modernization' of the ANC.¹⁶

The question now posed is whether the SACP will become the fourth pillar. There is a problem with having Communists in government—not for the reasons Johnson imagines, but because it condemns South Africa to the policies he supports.

¹⁵ Freedom of Expression Institute and University of Johannesburg Centre for Sociological Research, 'National Trends around Protest Action', February 2009.

¹⁶ SACP, *Bua Komanisi!*, vol. 5, no. 1, May 2006.

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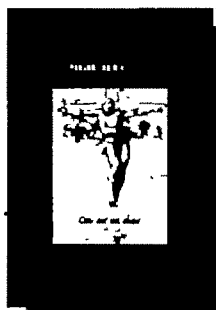
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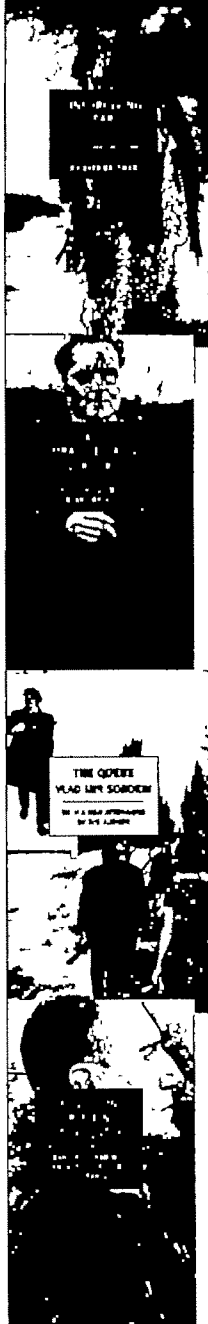
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ETIENNE BALIBAR

ALTHUSSER AND THE RUE D'ULM

I UNDERTOOK TO WRITE this obituary of Louis Althusser for the alumni of the École Normale Supérieure in 1993, nearly three years after the thinker's death; and not without hesitations and delays.¹ The moment happened to coincide with yet another change of fortune in the media image of our comrade, as the posthumous publication of two autobiographical texts had once more drawn attention, not without some commotion, to the fate of the '*catman* of the rue d'Ulm'.² This reawakening of curiosity about a man who had seemed forgotten, his writings virtually out of print, no doubt coincided with the lifting of certain taboos and the end of a latency period. For Althusser had been famous two times over: first, in the 1960s and 70s, as a Marxist philosopher and, with Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, Foucault and Barthes, an emblematic figure of 'French structuralism'; and second, for a few weeks at the end of 1980, as the unfortunate and scandalous protagonist of an unexpected *fait divers*, the murder of his wife Hélène, within the very walls of the École. By 1993, it seemed, enough time had passed for interest and nostalgia to appear, along with the need to explain events that now belonged to history.

It was nevertheless unclear whether this type of curiosity could lead to a lucid comprehension of Althusser's personality and intellectual role. Of course, it is neither possible nor desirable that there should be unanimity on such matters; but one might hope that they would at least be discussed on the basis of all the available facts, and of judgements independently reached. The time of writing, when testimony was still available from several generations of Althusser's colleagues, students, comrades, interlocutors, friends and adversaries, seemed a favourable moment for shedding light not simply on the fate of a man, however

exceptional or abnormal, but on the institutions and organizations with which his existence was so closely interwoven.¹

I should like therefore to make clear from the start what such a 'notice' will not be: neither a personal testimony, which would have been out of place in the *Annuaire* and would have required more space; nor a biography, to complement, confirm or correct the texts recently published, something for which I was not qualified; nor a formal presentation of Althusser's theoretical work; nor, finally, a detailed analysis of the role that, for more than thirty years, he played in the life of the École, and that it in turn played in his. Rather, it is intended as a reminder of the facts, followed by some reflections and hypotheses.

Career

Born on 16 October 1918 in Birmandreis, a suburb of Algiers, into a family of office workers and petty officials—his father, Charles, ended a career spent almost entirely in North Africa as head of the Marseilles office of the Compagnie Algérienne de Banque—Louis Althusser attended lycée in Marseilles, and prepared for the competitive examination to the ENS in the *khâgne* at Lyon, where his teachers notably included, for philosophy, Jean Guilton and Jean Lacroix, and for history,

¹ This essay is adapted from an obituary notice for Louis Althusser, written at the request of Jean Châtelet of the Association Amicale de Secours des Anciens Elèves de l'École Normale Supérieure. It first appeared in the Association's 1993 *Annuaire*, and annotated by the author in 2006, when it was published on the website of the Centre International d'Etude de la Philosophie Française Contemporaine.

² 'L'avenir dure longtemps' and 'Les faits', written respectively in 1985 and 1976, were published as *L'avenir dure longtemps suivi de Les Faits*, Paris 1992, and in English as *The Future Lasts a Long Time and The Facts*, London 1993. In what follows I draw on the first volume of the life by Yann Moulier Boutang: *Louis Althusser, une biographie*, Paris 1992.

³ Althusser's personal archives—manuscripts, correspondence, recorded lectures, administrative files, etc—were deposited by his heirs with the Institut Mémoires de l'Édition Contemporaine (IMEC) at St-Germain-La-Blanche-Herbe. Contributions by a number of people who knew or collaborated with Althusser, in France and abroad, have now been added to this material, to make a 'Fonds Althusser' available to researchers. I will take this opportunity to correct an erroneous idea that has agitated some of our colleagues: the École did not refuse to host a Fonds Althusser. It would in any case not have had the opportunity, as the negotiations between the IMEC and Althusser's heirs were completed before discussions between the latter and the Bibliothèque de l'ENS had got beyond an exploratory stage.

Joseph Hours. In his view these three masters of state education, representatives of distinct tendencies in Catholic thought, had a profound influence on his intellectual formation. Successful in the 1939 competition, Althusser was mobilized before the start of the academic year. He was taken prisoner with his artillery regiment in Brittany, and sent to a prisoner-of-war camp in Germany—Stalag XA, in Schleswig-Holstein—where he was to spend the rest of the War. He returned to his studies in October 1945. There followed a few uncertain months, in which it seems that Jean Baillou, deputy director of the École, helped to reassure him that it would be possible to overcome this dreadful six-year ‘interruption’. Althusser obtained his *diplôme d’études supérieures* with an essay on ‘The notion of content in Hegel’s philosophy’ under the supervision of Gaston Bachelard, coming second in the 1948 *agrégation*. Close friendship and intellectual affinity linked him both to Jacques Martin (class of 1941, translator of Hegel and Hermann Hesse, who committed suicide in 1963) and to Michel Foucault (class of 1946).

In the year that he graduated Althusser was appointed *calman* in philosophy, succeeding Georges Gusdorf. He held this post without interruption until 1980, with the rank of *agrégé-répétiteur*, then *maître-assistant* and *maître de conférences*—first on his own, then together with Jacques Derrida and Bernard Pautrat. From 1950 he was also secretary of the humanities department of the École, and in this capacity played an active part, alongside successive directors, in the management and orientation of the establishment.⁴ In 1975 he defended a *doctorat d’État* thesis at the Université de Picardie, before a jury made up of Bernard Rousset, Yvon Belaval, Madeleine Barthélémy-Madaule, Jacques D’Hondt and Pierre Vilar.⁵ After the murder of his wife on 16 November 1980, the judicial *non-lieu* pronouncing him unfit to plead under Article 64 of the Penal Code, on the basis of psychiatric evidence from Drs Brion, Diederich and Ropert, and the confinement order obtained by the Prefecture of Police, he retired from his post. The administration of the École then asked his friends to empty the apartment that he had occupied for more than twenty years in the south-west corner of the ground floor of the main building, opposite the infirmary where his friend Dr Étienne lived.

⁴ The Fonds Althusser contains a full series of notes taken at both the École’s ‘small’ and ‘large’ councils, which undoubtedly form a source of primary importance for future historians of the École in the post-war years.

⁵ See the ‘Soutenance d’Amiens’, republished in *Positions*, Paris 1976; translated as ‘Is it Simple to be a Marxist in Philosophy?’, in *Essays in Self-Criticism*, London 1976.

The last ten years of Althusser's life were spent in various psychiatric establishments—the Hôpital Sainte-Anne; 'L'eau vive' hospital of the 13th arrondissement at Soisy-sur-Seine; the Marcel Rivière centre at La Verrière—initially under a regime of administrative detention, then as a voluntary patient; or else at the apartment he had acquired with a view to his retirement on the rue Lucien-Leuwen, in the 20th arrondissement, where he notably stayed for a long and almost uninterrupted period from 1984 to 1986. Treated by various doctors, he was now visited only by a few friends, old or new, but never left alone. Michelle Loi and Stanislas Breton, in particular, took the responsibility of providing him with constant company.

These facts are enough to give an idea of the strength of the link—for all its problematic aspects—between Althusser and the École. This tie, 'physical' as much as 'moral', is probably unique in the history of the ENS; notwithstanding the case of Lucien Herr, often compared with Althusser in this respect, though he never actually lived on the premises, or some of the great directors of its scientific laboratories, such as Yves Rocard, Albert Kirmann, Alfred Kastler or Jean Brossel.

Teacher

The first point to stress is the continuity of Althusser's work with his philosophy students. His official role was to prepare them for the *agrégation*, over which he always took particular care. He did not generally develop very close relationships with his students—with individual exceptions—until the final year. Through to the early 1960s, his influence on successive doctoral candidates essentially took the form of corrections, revision classes and conversations that constituted a kind of 'tutoring' in the English style; and lectures—exceptionally clear, condensed and meticulously prepared—on the set authors and those philosophers he particularly favoured, notably Machiavelli, Malebranche, Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hegel, Feuerbach.⁶ The many different directions taken by his students—among them,

⁶ One can get a sense of the lectures from the essay on Rousseau, 'Sur le Contrat social (les Décalages)', carefully edited but very close to the lecture on which it was based, which appeared in *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* 8, autumn 1967, translated in *Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hegel and Marx*, London 1972, and especially from the volume edited by François Matheron. Louis Althusser, *Politique et Histoire de Machiavel à Marx: Cours à l'École Normale Supérieure, 1955–1972*, Paris 2006.

most of the great names of the University and of contemporary French philosophy—testify to the fertility of this teaching and the intellectual freedom it afforded.

Without ever abandoning this fundamental work, from the 1960s he added a new element, of a rather different character. Having started to publish his own writings—on Montesquieu in 1959, Feuerbach in 1960, the essays 'On the young Marx' and 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' in 1961 and 62, as well as 'Philosophie et sciences humaines' in 1963⁷—Althusser was approached by philosophy students from different years and asked to organize a course open to a wider audience. He did so in the form of 'seminars', in which he intervened only as *primus inter pares*, but whose impact would be decisive for a whole generation. The series began in 1961–62 with 'The Young Marx', continuing in 1962–63 with 'The Origins of Structuralism', in 1963–64 with 'Lacan and Psychoanalysis', and culminating in 1964–65 with 'Reading Capital', the basis for the collective work of that title. At this point the situation changed again: Althusser had become famous in the space of a few months as the inspirer of a philosophical 'school', ephemeral enough, but which gave rise to heated political polemics; he soon abandoned this type of activity in favour of other initiatives. Even before 1968, and *a fortiori* afterwards, he returned to a more traditional preparation of students for the *agrégation*; restricted lecture courses and increasingly, due to his illness, the simple marking of essays.⁸

A second aspect of Althusser's activity at the École was linked to the first: that of a true director of studies in philosophy, sometimes on his own and at others working with two exceptional collaborators and friends: the

⁷ See 'Montesquieu: Politics and History', in *Politics and History*. The presentation accompanying his translation of Feuerbach, published as *Manifestes philosophiques*, and the essays 'On the Young Marx' and 'Contradiction and Overdetermination', appear in *For Marx*, London 1969.

⁸ It has been said—generally by those ignorant of the chronological and symptomatic details—that for a long time the École 'protected' Althusser, whether in the sense of tolerating unofficial absences or of turning a blind eye to pathological behaviour. It is true that the widespread sympathy felt for Althusser at the École ensured a certain discretion—not the same as secrecy—with respect to the depressive crises which his sense of dignity forbore to publicize. For the rest, his teaching obligations, far from seeming a burden, were clearly a source of pleasure and a stabilizing factor for him; they could be arranged for convenient times, and his administrative responsibilities shared out or delegated when he was on leave.

director of the school, Jean Hyppolite, and then his colleague, Jacques Derrida.⁹ At a time when the École, or at least its humanities division, was still officially no more than a hall of residence combined with a library, specializing in preparing students for the *agrégation*, Althusser sought to develop, by means of lectures and seminars, the basis for a genuine training in research and for a proper 'philosophical life'.¹⁰ The questions covered ranged from the history of philosophy and epistemology to aesthetics, linguistics and sociology. Althusser was acutely aware of the importance of the 'human sciences'. A declared opponent of positivism and a central protagonist in contemporary episodes of the *Methodenstreit*, he saw a double guarantee at stake in keeping close relations between these disciplines and philosophy—of realism for the latter, and of resistance to their own technicist imperialism for the others. His organizational work aimed at making the École an animating centre for a philosophy that was 'living', not 'academic', and open to international discussions—not against the University, whence all these contributions came, but alongside it, and operating more freely than it would have in some of the University's structures. For a number of years it was a notable success. Without denying the importance of other contributions, special mention should be made of Althusser's role in inviting Lacan to hold his seminar in psychoanalysis at the École, starting in 1964.

There is a third aspect of Althusser's pedagogic activity, in the broadest sense of the term, on which it seems all the more important to insist in that it relates to a vocation of the École at risk of being forgotten by students and teachers alike, or endangered by the atmosphere of the times. This was the systematic organization of opportunities for encounter and intellectual exchange—of a common formation—for both 'humanities' and 'science' students. It is not surprising that the impulse for this should come from a philosopher, although clearly nothing would have come of it without requests, interest and collaboration from teachers, researchers and students in other disciplines. Besides, in this respect Althusser was following, albeit in his own manner, the path suggested by Hyppolite.

⁹ Another memorable collaboration was with the logician Roger Martin, the École librarian, which continued after Martin's appointment to the Université Paris-V.

¹⁰ Those he invited as guest lecturers, or whose visits he organized at the request of his students, included Gueroult, Canguilhem and Beaufret, de Gandillac, Vuillemin, Granger, Laplanche, Birault, Aubenque, Derathé, Culioli, Foucault, Serres, Vernant, Bourdieu, Bettelheim, Guillermit, Stanislas Breton, Deleuze, Passeron, Touraine, Meillassoux, Brunschwig, Teyssèdre, Matheron, Pessel, Joly, Bouveresse, Raymond, Negri and Linhart.

Among the initiatives he took were the lectures in pure mathematics for 'humanities' students and, above all, the 'Philosophy course for scientists' of 1967–68, which he ran with the assistance of a group of his former students (Pierre Macherey, myself, François Regnault, Michel Pêcheux and Alain Badiou, as well as Michel Fichant, a student of Canguilhem at the Sorbonne); and which, until the 'May events', attracted a very large audience in the Salle Dussane, both from within the École and beyond.²² A few years later, Althusser was the moving spirit behind the 'Philosophy and Mathematics' seminar, run by Maurice Loi in collaboration with Maurice Caveing, Pierre Cartier and René Thom, and which continues to this day. These initiatives obviously benefited from an ambience that was exceptionally favourable to epistemology and to critical reflection on scientific practices, as well as from the prestige and conviction of their promoter. They are a good illustration of Althusser's vocation as a *passer* or 'mediator' between the components of the university.

Philosopher

At this point it seems appropriate to give some indications on Althusser's personal work, developed entirely within the walls of 45, rue d'Ulm.²³ Independently of the value and style of his writing, its timely or untimely character, some of its status was surely due to this setting. Yet the majority of its readers and interlocutors came from somewhere altogether different.

The work, of course, is limited in quantity, at least in terms of texts published in Althusser's lifetime. (Several remained unpublished, although more or less complete; but they do not represent the mass imagined by some commentators, intrigued by the 'disproportion' between the ambition of the projects Althusser sketched out and the relatively small number of his publications. Such guesses underestimate the obstacles to creative activity posed by long periods of depression and recovery.) As we know from numerous witnesses, the major essays were typically drafted in a few days or even a few hours of uninterrupted work, facilitated by a mood of exaltation—which is not to say that they were not based on any preparatory study. Althusser's assertions that he had 'read nothing', or

²² Parts of this course, edited by the lecturers involved, were published by Maspero in its 'Théorie' collection. The set of original mimeographs is deposited in the ENS library, as well as at the IMEC.

²³ With the exception of certain texts written on vacation, particularly in Italy, and in the country house that he and his wife had acquired at Gordes in the Vaucluse.

had only a 'makeshift' philosophical formation, should be understood in highly relative terms. On the other hand, it is certainly true that he always took advantage of his exceptional ability to listen and his taste for theoretical conversation, to substitute oral exchanges for long bibliographic investigation. Why read a book on your own, or wait for the publication of an article, when you can have its author explain it to you in detail, and seek the 'centre' of the problem together? This 'method' naturally had its risks in terms of *quid pro quo*. It was facilitated by Althusser's actually living in the École, where his office occupied a 'strategic' position: you went to the library to read, to his office to talk. This did not apply only to philosophers: how many visitors, friends and former students, French and foreign colleagues from across the world, found themselves thus temporarily enrolled in what he sometimes called—in an expression taken from the young Marx—the 'party of the concept'?

To return to Althusser's own work: although there are certain constant preoccupations—or obsessions—running through it, based on predilections for particular thinkers and guided by continuous enquiry, it nonetheless clearly divides into distinct periods. If we leave aside the texts of his apprenticeship (such as the very brilliant *diplôme d'études supérieures*),¹³ and the 'youthful' writings connected to his involvement in Catholic movements, the first period—running up to the early 1960s—can in retrospect be considered as a phase of accumulation. This culminated in the little book on Montesquieu. Althusser was at that time preparing the thesis for his *doctorat d'État*—on 'Politics and Philosophy of the Eighteenth Century in France', and on Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*—under the supervision of Hyppolite and Vladimir Jankélévitch. He had joined the PCF in 1948, but had always kept a distance from the 'official' productions of party Marxism (or else had not been invited to contribute). Instead, he followed his own path of reflections on the relations between Marxism and philosophy—in particular the notion of alienation, and the 'humanist' and 'anti-humanist' tendencies in Marx's thought—and on the theoretical implications of psychoanalysis.¹⁴

¹³ Althusser's paper, in fact a book, 'Du contenu dans la pensée de G. W. F. Hegel', written in 1947, was published in the first volume of *Écrits philosophiques et politiques*, Paris 1994, edited by François Matheron; translated as *The Spectre of Hegel: Early Writings*, London and New York 1997.

¹⁴ This would lead in 1964 to the article 'Freud and Lacan', first published in *La Nouvelle Critique*; and in English in NLR 1/55, May–June 1969. Elisabeth Roudinesco, in particular, has shown the role this played in reorienting debates on Marxism, anthropology and psychoanalysis in France.

The second period—that of the 1960s, from his first article ‘On the Young Marx’ through to the 1968 lecture ‘Lenin and Philosophy’, both before and after *Reading Capital*—is the best known. It was undoubtedly also that of his strongest works, or at least the most finished, even when they took a programmatic, interrogative form. Althusser was a man of essays, of ‘notes for research’, of theses that were really hypotheses, in accordance with one of his favourite sayings, attributed to Napoleon, *On s’engage . . . et puis on voit*. It was these works that introduced the notions of ‘symptomatic reading’, ‘epistemological break’, ‘overdetermination’, ‘structural causality’ and ‘theoretical practice’. It was these works, too, whether one likes it or not, that established a close connection between the twentieth-century transformations of Marxism, philosophical ‘structuralism’—as an original alternative to both naturalism and transcendental idealism, including the latter’s phenomenological variant, as well as to logicism and historicism¹⁵—and finally that form of historical epistemology known as ‘French’, i.e., rationalist and dialectical. (It is a good bet that this conjugation is the source of the embarrassment expressed in many present judgements on what has mistakenly been called *la pensée* 68.)

I have mentioned the context in which these works were developed. To stress the cooperative aspects of Althusser’s thought, which went far beyond the group of names listed in the collective publications, is not to detract from its autonomy, nor to diminish his role as an initiating ‘motor’. Here was a good illustration of the proposition advanced by Spinoza—to whom Althusser constantly referred—that individualization and cooperation are not opposed terms, but correlative ones.¹⁶

Seventies

The ‘shock’ of 1968, experienced *in absentia*, belatedly prompted Althusser to an intensive activity of correspondence and exchange

¹⁵ I use these expressions as shorthand; it is well known that almost all the protagonists of the ‘structuralist’ movement rejected this description at one time or another, above all to preserve their respective originality.

¹⁶ This cooperation in part found expression in the ‘Théorie’ collection, which he established and directed for François Maspero from 1965 to 1980. This included books and essays by Alain Badiou, myself, Gérard Duménil, Bernard Edelman, Michel Fichant, Françoise Gadet, Dominique Lecourt, Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, Michelle Loi, Cesare Luporini, Pierre Macherey, Jean-Pierre Olier, Michel Pêcheux, Pierre Raymond, Emmanuel Terray and André Tosel.

throughout the 1970s, indissociable from his many-sided engagement with questions of the 'educational apparatus'.⁷ It was no less clear, after the event, that the 'shock' had also demolished a good part of the foundations and conditions of realization for the politico-theoretical project he had constructed in the 1960s. Althusser's work now took a new direction, but it also became far more fragmentary. This was due to a number of factors, independent in themselves, but which ultimately came to form an inextricable 'knot'. Concerning philosophy not as speculation but as combat—Kant's *Kampfplatz*, which he renamed 'class struggle within theory'—he necessarily had to try to 'rectify' or 'adjust' his interventions in proportion to the effects they had produced, or those he thought they had. At the same time, now that he had won international renown—certain Latin American militants considering him almost a new Marx—the pressures of political immediacy weighed on him ever more heavily. He found himself involved in heated organizational conflicts, inseparable from personal quarrels. His illness grew worse, leading to longer and more frequent stays in clinics or rest homes, in the course of which various chemical anti-depressive combinations were tried out on him. This in itself destroyed any possibility of continuous work.

With hindsight it is tempting to suggest that these subjective vicissitudes were simply one way of 'living' the successive stages in the decomposition of Communism. For while Althusser loudly proclaimed the necessity and autonomy of theory, his own intellectual activity was indissolubly linked to the perspective of a 'refoundation' of the Communist movement: the attempt to anticipate its reconstruction, at national and international levels, on the far side of its present crisis. He found himself caught first in the blows and counter-blows of the Sino-Soviet split, then in the polemic over 'Eurocommunism' and the PCF's official abandonment of the notion of 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. His alleged 'theoreticism' was criticized from opposite sides, often in identical terms. The successive self-criticisms he undertook might seem a regressive, even destructive process. From a purely philosophical point of view, however, their result was to reveal the themes of a philosophy of historical contingency—no 'overdetermination' without 'underdetermination'—and the 'materiality

⁷ The famous article on 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' (first published in *La Pensée*, June 1970; English translation in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, London 1971), which was an extract from an unfinished and unpublished text on 'Law, State, Ideology', attests to the strategic importance that Althusser ascribed to the question of the educational institution at this time.

of ideologies' as an element in every practice, theoretical practice included. The virtual convergence of these themes provides an outline of what might have been the doctrine of a 'second Althusser', radicalizing the critique of philosophies of the 'constitutive subject' and *le sens de l'histoire* that had been characteristic of the first.¹⁸ This is why any reductive interpretation—whether relying on political determinations or psychiatric stereotypes—is almost certain to miss the mark.

It remains to describe Althusser's activity in his final period, between the end of his administrative confinement and the surgical operation that led in 1987 to a new phase of deep melancholy, practically without remission. A partial idea of this can be gleaned from an autobiographical text published in 1992, as well as from fragments of conversation transcribed and published in Mexico by Fernanda Navarro.¹⁹ Now more than ever, he was subject to alternating phases of exaltation and anxiety. He was also caught between the dejection into which his isolation had plunged him, and a sometimes violent desire to 'raise the tombstone', that is, the ban on public expression that society *de facto* imposes on murderers, whether they are considered responsible or not. He attempted to reconstitute a milieu of interlocutors rather like those he had welcomed to his office on the rue d'Ulm. Some of his friends cooperated in this, others refused to do so, or—like the present author—tried awkwardly to strike a balance between what they believed 'reasonable' and what they saw as 'delirious' (or 'imprudent'). It is unlikely that the texts drafted during this period, whose publication has been announced by Althusser's heirs, will contain theoretical revelations. But there is no reason to exclude what they may add to his œuvre; together with other unpublished works, they will permit a fairer assessment of the reasons for his influence.²⁰

¹⁸ For a full bibliography of Althusser's production during this period see Gregory Elliott, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory*, 2nd ed., Leiden 2006.

¹⁹ *Filosofía y marxismo*, Mexico City 1988; English translation in *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978–1987*, London and New York 2006.

²⁰ Since this obituary was written, numerous unpublished texts by Althusser have appeared. They oblige me to correct the—apparently—negative import of this judgement, especially with regard to the manuscript 'Machiavel et nous', which basically dates from 1972. This was published in French in volume 2 of *Écrits philosophiques et politiques*, Paris 1995, and in English as *Machiavelli and Us*, London and New York 1999. In addition, Althusser's sketches on his 'last philosophy', which he called 'aleatory materialism' or 'materialism of the encounter', have given rise to a lively body of interpretative work. See 'The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter', in *Philosophy of the Encounter*.

Politics

I shall not attempt here to describe Althusser's political positions and activity as a whole, nor to explain their effects or the reactions they provoked in France and abroad. This is a question of general history, not just the history of intellectuals. It seems indispensable, however, to try to characterize the profound influence they had on his relations with the École. Although Althusser sought—through thought, travel, personal relationships—not to be confined within it, in many respects he considered the École as a *political arena*: both 'macro-political' and 'micro-political'. This is something for which many people, both at the time and since, would not forgive him—failing to see what this formulation owed to a conjuncture of which Althusser was far more the product than the instigator, or the way in which it expressed a long-standing, latent truth. The 'political' relations of scholar and scholastic institution may be experienced and practised in widely different ways, replete with contradictions. These make themselves felt in the oscillation between, on the one hand, the temptation to turn the—*enclosed*—university setting into a substitute for the 'real' political stage; and on the other, the attempt to *open* what has always been a privileged corps, selected for professional-intellectual formation, onto a wider sphere of social movements, opening a virtually borderless communication between classes and nations.²¹ The question demands a level of critical reflection which, to date, has been sadly missing; above all with regard to the inter-action between historical conjunctures, institutional dynamics and individual personalities.

Like many of the intellectuals of his generation, Althusser joined the Communist Party immediately after the war. He often described how his first political activity—alongside the campaign for the Stockholm Appeal—was to establish a student union branch at the École and win the administration's recognition of it. When he found himself charged

²¹ This dual tendency was further accentuated by some of Althusser's disciples (who quickly turned against him), such as the 'Maoists' of 1966–70, who evidently dreamed of making the École into a kind of 'red base', along the lines of the factories in which the more consistent of their number would subsequently 'establish' themselves. This dream was in certain respects nothing more than a mirror-image of the more recent technocratic project of using the Grandes Écoles as a 'white base' for militant neoliberalism; moreover, it went hand in hand with an astonishing reverence for the ENS and its history as an institution.

with administrative responsibilities, even lower-level ones, rather than an insoluble contradiction or the occasion for a 'double game' (for which he was sometimes criticized), one might argue that he saw it as the opportunity for elaborating and implementing an original conception of politics within the institution. This was far removed from the method of Marxist organizations, even when these followed the 'mass line', but also from group dynamics or business management techniques, since it combined a practice of constant negotiations with the idea that the institution was riven by irreducible social antagonisms. Administrator, teacher, but also militant—and a militant fiercely attached to his 'base'—Althusser found himself *de facto* at the point where *all* the categories in the establishment converged, and at favourable moments he was able to take effective advantage of this; though he also paid the price for it in moments of personal and collective crisis.

Just as he worked ceaselessly for good communication between the humanities and sciences at the École, so he also maintained relations of trust, even friendship, with directors and colleagues in other disciplines, and with the managerial and service staff. The Communist 'cell', of which he was one of the main organizers, served at least as much as a circle for reflection on the École's everyday problems or larger goals as for general political debate and public intervention, functioning largely independently of any outside organization.²² It proved to be better adapted to the role of mediation and critical consciousness than other networks that spanned the institution (trade-union, religious, even artistic and sporting groups). Naturally, more detailed testimony would be needed in order to delimit this reality within its epoch, and to appreciate its effects without idealizing them. One would also need to know what it owed to other personalities, beside Althusser, and to the atmosphere of the time: the Cold War, the Algerian War, the student movement before and after '1968'; the Union of the Left. But the fact as such seems undeniable.

In many respects, Althusser's comportment within the PCF was not dissimilar from his stance within state education—or rather, within that very atypical sector of state education constituted by a 'higher' establishment that was, for all concerned, a collectivity, a place of life. This comparison seems to me at least as illuminating as that often made,

²² Despite the surveillance carried out on it by the *missi dominici* of the PCF leadership in the years of 'contestation'.

both generally and in Althusser's case, between Communist organizing and the Catholic Church, from which he emerged. The Communist Party has in common with the Church not only a messianic perspective, including the idea of its own 'imminent' disappearance, but also the fact of getting on with the sometimes sordid management of earthly realities. But it would not be wrong to say that, for Althusser, the Party was, like the *École*, a place where the material necessity of an institution, in which one constantly had to work towards its transformation, made itself felt both in general and in particular, through the contradictory demands of teaching and tactics, analyses and relations of force, collective action for national stakes and personal influence. It is all the more remarkable that Althusser, who never stopped practising this 'double membership', seeking to intervene in the *École* as a Communist and in the Communist Party as a *normalien* and a scholar, never confused or amalgamated the two domains. One can reject his style and his choices, but one cannot accuse him of practising any sort of 'entryism'.

Throughout its history, the intellectual life of the *École Normale*—and sometimes its institutional vicissitudes—has been marked by the political debates of the day, in which its students and teachers have often been fully engaged. The years from 1950 to 1980 only represent a particularly rapid succession of challenges and turns in the situation. Althusser, an independent Communist and then a critical one, constantly questioning Party orthodoxy but never a real 'dissident', made his own choices—or non-choices—in the face of the Cold War, the anti-colonial struggles, the battles of parties or factions; as did his fellow-thinkers, students and comrades. But he engaged *from* the *École*, and in a certain sense *with* the *École*. This deeply ambivalent 'complex' demands analysis, yet renders it very difficult indeed.

Private and public

At this point the question of Althusser's 'illness' or 'madness' has to be addressed. Psychiatrists have called the cyclical disturbances of mood (exultation/anguish), which Althusser had suffered since his youth, or at least since his return from war-time captivity, 'manic-depressive psychosis'; we may hope they know what they mean by that.³³ Biographical writings,

³³ The crisis in the course of which, following six months of treatment that proved ineffective and perhaps made matters worse, Althusser strangled his wife 'without a struggle', has been termed by experts an 'acute melancholic episode'.

and his own autobiographical ones, have offered various elements of individual psychology and history relating to his family environment, his childhood, his friendships, his sexuality, his married life, etc; but I shall leave these aside here, since I lack the competence to assess their pertinence or bearing. What does clearly emerge from the facts, on the other hand, is a 'correspondence' between Althusser's practice, his political representations and his uninterrupted residence (day and night!) at the École over more than thirty years. Given that this came in the wake of five years of captivity, which had immediately followed childhood and the 'community' life, or something like it, he had experienced at lycée, one might suggest that Althusser, either by dint of a personal subjective constitution or due to circumstances (most likely, the interaction between the two), was never really capable of forming any other 'family' than the expanded community of the ENS.²⁴ The situation does not call for any value judgement, whether or not veiled as a reference to 'normality' (in what way is nuclear family life more 'normal' than life in a community?); but it clearly involves constraints and repercussions all the stronger for being generally denied. What kind of 'community' is the École, or was it at that time? This is the issue that Althusser's life story forces us to face.²⁵

The question is closely bound up with politics. The dramatic episodes that marked the first years of Althusser's commitment to Communism—the injunction given him by the cell of École students to separate from his partner, whom the party viewed as politically dangerous; the suicide of his friend Claude Engelmann (class of 1949), a biologist and the cell's secretary, at the time of the Lysenko affair; the disapproval Foucault experienced on account of his homosexuality, etc—all involve the triple aspects of politics, family (or quasi-family) and community. Exactly the same goes for the late 1960s, when Althusser's conflict with his closest disciples, all *normaliens* in a certain sense 'adopted' by his wife and himself, over the split in the Union des Étudiants Communistes would lead both sides to the edge of the precipice. Was it very different, even if the drama was not always visible (it was sometimes comedy), with the activities of the group

²⁴ We might consider as a symptom of this failure the moment, in the late 1960s, when Hélène Legotien-Rytman, Althusser's partner and future wife, came to live with him in the apartment at the École, precisely because this seems to be no more than the mundane decision of a couple. Althusser's apartment was a private place only in appearance. Or rather it became, with some others, a place of intense 'privatization' of public space, and as such, the object of an uninterrupted 'demand'.

²⁵ This question is rarely posed for the ENS, though it is frequently asked of the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge.

for thought and 'intervention' he attempted to establish with some of his students and former students in the mid 1960s, and which he sought several times to reconstitute after it had broken up?

None of this can be understood unless one begins by tracing the specific context of the pseudo-familial community that the École constituted in that period for those who lived there continuously, if only for a few years.²⁶ But none of it would be of much interest, either, if explanation were restricted to conventional psychological or psychoanalytic notions—Oedipus, repressed homosexuality, etc. What is at issue here is the uncertainty of the dividing line between public and private, on which our system of institutions theoretically rests. It turns out that this question is a particularly insistent one within Althusser's own thought. The search for a 'point of view'—theoretical, class-based—from which it would be possible to analyse the origin, functions and modalities of the difference between public and private spheres (should we, like Derrida, say *différance*?), and consequently the manner in which this difference governs the subjective position of individuals and groups, was the organizing principle behind an essential part of Althusser's work; perhaps the most central part, if not the most developed.

For this reason I would like, in conclusion, to hazard a hypothesis. We could stop at the image of Althusser as organizer of 'passages' between sections of the École, of 'mediations' between functions; identifying himself with the institution so as to provide a personal—no doubt pathogenic—protection against the 'outside world'; but also in order to try to open it to the social conflicts and realities of the world, beyond the expected 'modernizing' horizons—high public office, political careers,

²⁶ On this subject, everything remains to be said. To speak of a 'homosexual community', as has been done, is very imprecise. In fact, the dominant milieu, that of the *homoioi*—*normaliens* and *archicubes* (former students)—was by definition *unisexuel* (I am speaking of course of the École before the merger between the rue d'Ulm and the rue de Sèvres). Those women who made their way into it, living and working there, whether as domestic staff, librarians, *secrétaires* or companions, played a role as ambivalent as it was important; all the more, given that the École was in no way monastic (nor military) in its mores. The cleavage between homosexuality and heterosexuality clearly plays a role in the individualization of personalities. But the real question lies elsewhere: it bears on the unconscious articulation between these mores, demarcations, evolutions, and the propulsive nature of the 'links' and 'models' that structure institutions such as the École, the university, the civil service. We must admit that Althusser, like many others, never pronounced on these problems

business, international and interdisciplinary research. Or we could take a further step and suggest that, placed by fate (and held there indefinitely by the 'structure') at the focal point of the tensions generated by the coexistence of two distinct and yet indissociable places, private and public, in what was outwardly a single institution, Althusser sought to sublimate this situation, apparently privileged but in reality untenable, in order to turn it into material for philosophical elaboration.

But one could also completely reverse the terms of the problem, and suppose that Althusser sought out all the experiences that brought this situation up against its limits, precisely in an attempt to understand its ambivalence and its necessity. For him, then, the *École* would have been only an 'analyser' of a much more general contradiction. To put it in his language, it was, more than any other institution, the very model of the 'ideological state apparatus' that 'interpellates individuals as subjects'.

Should the ENS be grateful to him for this demonstration, or resent him for it? Many of our colleagues, for whom the *École* is also symbolically a part of themselves, will no doubt ask this, just as they will ask whether the *École* should be obliged to Althusser for having made the name of the 'rue d'Ulm' echo as far as the *poblaciones* of Chile and the campuses of Japan and Australia, or whether he should be reproached for having stamped it with infamy. But today, the question need not be posed in such Manichean terms. Apart from the fact that he himself paid a heavy price for his reasoning and his follies, the times have changed: neither the family, nor philosophy, teaching, politics, nor community are what they were thirty years ago. No one could any longer feel 'at home' between the Pot, the infirmary and the Cour du Ruffin,²⁷ no one could imagine that the fate of the world was at stake in a seminar in the Salle Cavaillès. Hence there is more freedom, to be sure, and less power. The question of 'theoretical practice', subjectively and objectively, will be raised in other places, perhaps; and certainly in other styles.

Translated by David Fernbach

²⁷ Pot: the refectory, in the jargon of ENS students, and Cour du Ruffin, one of the internal courtyards, named after a former professor of physical education who organized daily exercises there.

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FREDRIC JAMESON

MARX AND MONTAGE

IT IS ALWAYS good to have a new Kluge, provided you know what lies in store for you. His latest film, *News from Ideological Antiquity*—some nine hours long—is divided into three parts: I. Marx and Eisenstein in the Same House; II. All Things are Bewitched People; III. Paradoxes of Exchange Society.¹ Rumour has it that Kluge has here filmed Eisenstein's 1927–28 project for a film version of Marx's *Capital*, whereas in fact only Kluge's first part deals with this tantalizing matter. The rumour has been spread by the same people who believe Eisenstein actually wrote a sketch for a film on *Capital*, whereas he only jotted down some twenty pages of notes over a half-year period.² And at least some of these people know that he was enthusiastic about Joyce's *Ulysses* during much the same time and 'planned' a film on it, a fact that distorts their fantasies about the *Capital* project as well. Yet if Eisenstein's notes for film projects all looked like this until some of them were turned into 'real'—that is to say, fiction or narrative—films, it is only fair to warn viewers that Kluge's 'real' films look more like Eisenstein's notes.

Many important intellectuals have—as it were, posthumously—endorsed Marxism: one thinks of Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* and of Deleuze's unrealized *Grandeur de Marx*, along with any number of more contemporary witnesses to the world crisis ('we are all socialists now', etc.). Is Kluge's new film a recommitment of that kind? Is he still a Marxist? Was he ever one? And what would 'being a Marxist' mean today? The Anglo-American reader may even wonder how the Germans in general now relate to their great national classic, with rumours of hundreds of *Capital* reading groups springing up under the auspices of the student wing of the Linkspartei. Kluge says this in the accompanying printed matter: 'The possibility of a European revolution seems to have vanished; and along with it the belief in a historical process that can be directly shaped by human

consciousness'.³ That Kluge believes in collective pedagogy, however, and in the reappropriation of negative learning processes by positive ones, in what one might call a reorientation of experience by way of a reconstruction of 'feelings' (a key or technical term for him): this is evident not only in his interpretive comments on his various films and stories, but also in such massive theoretical volumes as his *Geschichte und Eigensinn*—History and Obstinacy—written in collaboration with Oskar Negt.

All of these works bear on history; and of few countries can one say that they have lived so much varied history as Germany. Balzac's work would have been impossible without the extraordinary variety of historical experience encountered by the French, from revolution to world empire, from foreign occupation to economic reconstruction, and not excluding unspeakable suffering and failure along with war crimes and atrocities. Kluge's stories, or anecdotes, or *faits divers*—some thousands of pages of them—draw on a comparable mass of historical raw material.

But history is something you have to dig up and to dig in: like Kluge's heroine Gabi Teichert in *Die Patriotin*, who literally gets out her spade and frantically excavates, scrabbling for clues to the past in bones and potsherds. And not necessarily in vain: in another film, the knee of a German soldier's skeleton testifies and tells some 'useful' war stories. Indeed, *News from Ideological Antiquity* has its own share of zany or even idiotic moments—a pair of actors reading Marx's incomprehensible prose aloud and in unison to one another, a DDR instructor explaining 'liquidity' to a recalcitrant pupil, and even a kind of concluding satyr play in which the (rather tiresome) comedian Helge Schneider plays a variety of Marx-inspired roles, complete with wigs, false beards and other circus paraphernalia. For as Kluge tells us, 'we must let Till Eulenspiegel pass across Marx and Eisenstein both, in order to create a confusion allowing knowledge and emotions to be combined together in new ways'.⁴

Meanwhile, on a less jocular level, we confront a sometimes interminable series of talking heads—Enzensberger, Sloterdijk, Dietmar

³ Alexander Kluge, *Nachrichten aus der ideologischen Antike* (News from Ideological Antiquity), 3 DVDs, Frankfurt 2008.

⁴ These are published as Eisenstein's 'Notes for a Film of *Capital*', translated by Maciej Sliwowski, Jay Leyda and Annette Michelson, in *October: The First Decade*, Cambridge, MA 1987, pp. 115–38; they first appeared in *October* 2, 1976; hereafter NFC.

⁵ Kluge, *Nachrichten*, p. 4

⁶ Kluge, *Nachrichten*, p. 16.

Dath, Negt and other authorities—as they confront the typical Kluge interview, part prompting, part leading questions, part cross-examining his own witnesses. We glimpse a weird project of Werner Schroeter, in which Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* is acted out through the conflict on the bridge in *Battleship Potemkin* ('the rebirth of Tristan out of the spirit of Potemkin'); along with excerpts from operas by Luigi Nono and Max Brand, not to speak of the classics. We see a short by Tom Tykwer on the humanization of objects, sequences on the assassination of Rosa Luxemburg and, on a lighter note, an evening with Marx and Wilhelm Liebknecht. Many film clips and stills are interpolated, mostly from the silent period, and dramatic graphics from both Marxian and Eisensteinian texts make it clear that the intertitles of the silent period could be electrifying indeed, if resurrected in bold colour and dramatic typography. It is Kluge's own version of the Eisensteinian 'montage of attractions' (this filmmaker might say 'of feelings'). Viewers unaccustomed to his practices may well find this an unbelievable hodge-podge. But they too can eventually learn to navigate this prodigious site of excavation: not yet a full-fledged and professionally organized museum, this is an immense dig, with all kinds of people, amateur and specialist alike, milling around in various states of activity, some mopping their brows or eating a sandwich, others lying full-length on the ground in order to brush dirt from a jawbone, still others sorting various items into the appropriate boxes on tables sheltered by a tent, if not taking a nap or lecturing a novice, treading a narrow path so as not to step on the evidence. It is our first contact with ideological antiquity.

Eisenstein's version

Among the more recognizable fragments is, to be sure, that 'new work on a libretto by Karl Marx', the 'film treatise' which was supposedly Eisenstein's next project after *October*, the alleged film of *Capital*. As always, Eisenstein's notes are so many reflexions on his own practice, past and future; characteristically, they re-read his own work as a progression of forms, like progress in scientific experimentation. There is no point leaving this narcissism unacknowledged—it is the source of much of the pedagogical and didactic excitement and enthusiasm of his writings; but we do not necessarily have to accept his own assessments of his career, especially since they varied greatly throughout his life.

Here, for example, he will read his work in terms of abstraction: as the progressive conquest of abstraction from *Potemkin* through *October* to the current project. (We might have preferred him to characterize it as the enlargement of his filmic conquest of the concrete to include abstraction, but never mind.) Predictably, we move from the rising lions in *Potemkin* to that 'treatise on deity' which is the icons/idols sequence in *October*.⁵ These moments are then to be seen as essay-like vertical interruptions in a horizontal narrative; and this is precisely why the Eisenstein-Joyce discussion is irrelevant here.

Commentators—and not only Kluge himself—have fastened on the jotting, 'a day in a man's life' as the evidence for believing Eisenstein to have imagined a plot sequence like that of Joyce's *Bloodsday*.⁶ Later on, they note the addition of a second 'plot line', that of social reproduction and 'the "house-wifely virtues" of a German worker's wife', along with the reminder: 'throughout the entire picture the wife cooks soup for her returning husband', the unspecified 'man' of the earlier sequence having logically enough become a worker. This alleged routine cross-cutting—to which one should probably add the day in the life of a capitalist or a merchant—is being ruminated at the very same historical moment when, as Annette Michelson points out, Dziga Vertov is filming *Man with a Movie Camera*.⁷

It is true: 'Joyce may be helpful for my purpose', notes Eisenstein. But what follows is utterly different from the 'day in the life of' formula. For Eisenstein adds: 'from a bowl of soup to the British vessels sunk by England'.⁸ What has happened is that we have forgotten the presence, in *Ulysses*, of chapters stylistically quite different from the day's routine format. But Eisenstein has not: 'In Joyce's *Ulysses* there is a remarkable chapter of this kind, written in the manner of a scholastic catechism. Questions are asked and answers given'.⁹ But what is he referring to when he says, 'of this kind'?

It is clear that Kluge already knows the answer, for in his filmic discussion of the notes, the pot of soup has become a water kettle, boiling away and whistling: the image recurs at several moments in the exposition

⁵ NFC, p. 116.

⁶ NFC, p. 127.

⁷ NFC, p. 127, fn 19.

⁸ NFC, p. 127. This enigmatic reference is itself referenced in the longer quote from p. 129 given below.

⁹ NFC, p. 119.

(Eisenstein's notes projected in graphics on the intertitles), in such a way that this plain object is 'abstracted' into the very symbol of energy. It boils impatiently, vehemently it demands to be used, to be harnessed, it is either the whistling signal for work, for work stoppage, for strikes, or else the motor-power of a whole factory, a machine for future production . . . Meanwhile, this is the very essence of the language of silent film, by insistence and repetition to transform their objects into larger-than-life symbols; a procedure intimately related to the close-up. But this is also what Joyce does in the catechism chapter; and *Ulysses's* first great affirmation, the first thunderous 'yes', comes here and not in Molly's closing words: it is the primal force of water streaming from the reservoir into Dublin and eventually finding its way indomitably to Bloom's faucet.¹⁰ (In Eisenstein the equivalent would be the milk separator of *The General Line*.)

The German worker's wife

It is at this point that we glimpse what Eisenstein really has in mind here: something like a Marxian version of Freudian free association—the chain of hidden links that leads us from the surface of everyday life and experience to the very sources of production itself. As in Freud, this is a vertical plunge downward into the ontological abyss, what he called 'the navel of the dream'; it interrupts the banal horizontal narrative and stages an associative cluster charged with affect. It is worth quoting Eisenstein's full notation at this point:

Throughout the entire picture the wife cooks soup for her returning husband. NB Could be two themes intercut for association: the soup-cooking wife and the home-returning husband. Completely idiotic (all right in the first stages of a working hypothesis): in the third part (for instance), association moves from the pepper with which she seasons food. Pepper. Cayenne. Devil's Island. Dreyfus. French chauvinism. *Figaro* in Krupp's hands. War. Ships sunk in the port. (Obviously, not in such quantity!) NB Good in its non-banality—transition: pepper—Dreyfus—*Figaro*. It would be good to cover the sunken English ships (according to Kushner, 103 DAYS ABROAD) with the lid of a saucepan. It could even be not pepper—but kerosene for a stove and transition into oil.¹¹

¹⁰ See 'Ulysses in History', in *The Modernist Papers*, London and New York 2007.

¹¹ NFC, p. 129. Of the soup-cooking, Eisenstein has noted: 'the "house-wifely virtues" of a German worker's wife constitute the greatest evil, the strongest obstacle to a revolutionary uprising. A German worker's wife will always have something warm for her husband, will never let him go completely hungry. And there is the root of her negative role which slows the pace of social development. In the plot, this could take the form of "hot stop", and the meaning of this on "a world scale": NFC, p. 128.

Eisenstein proposes to do here what Brecht tried for in the coffee debate on the subway in *Kuhle Wampe*: to trace the visible symptoms back to their absent (or untotalizable) causes. But the dramatist's attempt is hijacked by our inevitable attention to the characters arguing, whereas Eisenstein aims, however crudely ('completely idiotic', but just a first draft), to draw the whole dripping complex up into the light as a montage of images. (The more appropriate cross-references were always Benjamin's omission of commentary in the Arcades constellations, and even Pound's ideograms—both of them also projects of a kind of synchronic historical representation.) Eisenstein's inevitable theorization of what he calls 'discursive film' centres on 'de-anecdotalization' as the central process here, and then finds its analogy in 'the working theory of "overtones"¹² which he was to develop a year later in his essay, 'The Filmic Fourth Dimension', in which a formulation in terms of 'physiological stimuli' will seek to displace the widely accepted Russian Formalist doctrine of the renewal of perception, of aesthetics' *ostranenie*, 'making strange'. Here there would be not only a conflict between the temporality of film (montage) and the simultaneity of the causal links or associations, but also a tension between the affective and the cognitive. Thus he writes of *The General Line*:

This montage is built, not on particular dominants, but takes as its guide the total stimulation through all stimuli. That is the original montage complex within the shot, arising from the collision and combination of the individual stimuli inherent in it.¹³

The theory of 'overtones' tended not only to foreground the bodily nature of sheer feeling—'the *physiological quality* of Debussy and Scriabin'—but also, by way of technical musical terms like 'dominant' and the contrapuntal, along with 'visual' overtones and undertones, to stake out the complexity of this whole 'fourth dimension' itself, which has inspired so much contemporary activity in so-called affect theory. It seems probable that the old myth of the 'persistence of vision'—the previous image subsisting briefly on the retina as the new perception comes to overlay and then replace it, a conception which has its musical analogue in pedal points—suggests a possible synthesis between the temporal succession of cinema and the contents of the individual images. But

¹² NFG, pp. 116–7.

¹³ Eisenstein, 'The Filmic Fourth Dimension', in *Film Form*, New York 1949, p. 67.

it does not resolve the tension that the most highly developed models of affect entertain with the cognitive content of these complexes; or in other words the Marxian attention to the production, distribution and consumption at work behind the phenomenological surface of everyday life and experience—going behind the scenes, as Marx describes it in *Capital*. The old problem of didactic art is not solved here, unless we are to think that knowledge of capitalism is at one with rage (*Potemkin*) or that the construction of socialism is at one with a sublime joy, as in the transcendental vision of the milk separator in *The General Line*.

Kluge does not try to reproduce the pepper sequence; but he does do something with another Eisensteinian motif:

woman's stocking full of holes and a silk one in a newspaper advertisement. It starts with a jerky movement, to multiply into 50 pairs of legs—*Revue, Silk, Art. The fight for the centimetre of silk stocking. The aesthetes are for it. The Bishops and morality are against.*¹⁴

But Kluge's rather decorative rehearsal of this multi-dimensional social object—he might also have included Kracauer's Busby Berkeley-like 'mass ornament'—scarcely reaches the allegorical complexities Eisenstein himself ultimately glimpsed:

On this level, one could solve:
Ein Paar seidene Strumpfe—art.
Ein Paar seidene Strumpfe—morality.
Ein Paar seidene Strumpfe—commerce and competition.
Ein Paar seidene Strumpfe—Indian women forced to incubate the silk cocoon by carrying them in *their armpits!*¹⁵

This final detail leads us back to the anecdotal level, which was supposed to have been neutralized in the new 'discursive' film language: yet it is surely what gives its piquancy to this vertical montage, just as Devil's Island and Dreyfus lend the pepper sequence its bite. And in fact, the notes are already full of anecdotal detail, of 'believe-it-or-not' *faits divers* that lead us to the very heart of capital. I like this one: 'Somewhere in the West. A factory where it is possible to pinch parts and tools. No search of workers made. Instead, the exit gate is a *magnetic* check point.'¹⁶ Chaplin

¹⁴ NFC, p. 129

¹⁵ NFC, p. 137.

¹⁶ NFC, p. 121.

would have liked the spectacle of nuts and bolts, hammers and wrenches, flying out of the workers' pockets.

Antiquities

Elective affinities: Kluge's own work is very much anecdotal in this sense, the narrative double-take, the unexpected punctum at the heart of what looked at first like a banal occurrence, a taste for the incongruity that is abstracted into his dealings with the great ideas. Deleuze's magnificent formula—'a clean-shaven Marx, a bearded Hegel'—would not be alien to him, as he tirelessly suggests new recordings of the stereotypical heritage on his own terms: the future reconstruction of experience, binding affects and knowledge together in new ways.

It is a future which demands the constitution of an antiquity appropriate to it. Yet is this 'ideological antiquity' not simply another way of saying that Marx, and with him Marxism, is outmoded? The comic sequences of Kluge's film, the young couple at various moments in history tormenting each other with a koranic recital of Marx's abstractions, might lead us to think so. Nor is Eisenstein non-outmoded either, with his baggage of old-fashioned melodrama, old-fashioned silent film, old-fashioned montage. Lenin and intertitles! Itself a seemingly dreary prospect for a digital postmodernity . . .

Yet one dimly remembers Marx's own feelings for antiquity: Prometheus and Aristotle's theory of value, Epicurus and Hegel's thoughts on Homer. And then there is the question with which the great 1857 draft introduction to the *Grundrisse* breaks off: 'the difficulty lies not in understanding that Greek art and epic poetry are bound up with certain forms of social development. The difficulty is that they still give us aesthetic pleasure and are in certain respects regarded as a standard and unattainable model.'⁷ Marx was anything but nostalgic, and he understood that the polis was a limited and thereby contradictory social formation to which one could scarcely return; and also that any future socialism would be far more complex than capitalism itself, as Raymond Williams once observed.

For the concept of antiquity may have the function of placing us in some new relationship with the Marxian tradition and with Marx himself—as

⁷ Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 28, New York 1986, p. 47.

well as Eisenstein. Marx is neither actual nor outmoded: he is classical, and the whole Marxist and Communist tradition, more or less equal in duration to Athens's golden age, is precisely that golden age of the European left, to be returned to again and again with the most bewildering and fanatical, productive and contradictory results.¹⁸ And if it is objected that it would be an abomination to glamorize an era that included Stalinist executions and the starvation of millions of peasants, a reminder of the bloodiness of Greek history might also be in order—the eternal shame of Megara, let alone the no less abominable miseries of slave society as such. Greece was Sparta as much as Athens, Sicily as much as Marathon; and the Soviet Union was also the deathknell of Nazism and the first sputnik, the People's Republic of China the awakening of countless millions of new historical subjects. The category of classical antiquity may not be the least productive framework in which a global left reinvents an energizing past for itself.

¹⁸ Something like this is what Peter Weiss's *Aesthetics of Resistance* can be said to be attempting.

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REVIEWS

Cristina Corradi, *Storia dei marxismi in Italia*
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PETER THOMAS

THE MOOR'S ITALIAN JOURNEYS

Rarely do elections outside the imperial centres have much international reverberation. More peripheral cultures, marginal to the grander schemes of accumulation or geopolitical design, are usually denied the honour of global attention: 'world-historic' events happen elsewhere. Exceptions to this rule tend to prove it. Fittingly, then, it was with an exception that the 'Italian anomaly' came to an end, with Berlusconi's third victory in the spring of 2008. It was not so much the incumbent and newly 'democratic' centre-left's crushing defeat at the hands of a motley crew, united by little more than a collective decision to pursue particularist interests, that attracted attention. Rather, it was the fact that, for the first time in the history of the Republic, there were to be no parties in the Italian parliament making explicit reference to the Communist and Marxist traditions. Crowning the victory for the right, or adding insult to injury for the left, was the fact that the ostensible 'refounders' of these traditions had themselves contributed in no small measure to their ostracism, votes for imperialist occupation by a self-declared party of 'non-violence' playing the role of the scratchings on the pottery of old.

In itself, it may not have been an important failure; but its likely long-term significance for both the European and international left becomes clearer when we recall the history that had preceded it. In many other cultures, 'Marxism' constituted a polemical point of reference defined by the distance it proposed to take from—or which was imposed upon it by—national intellectual life. Postwar Italy, in contrast, witnessed the emergence of a galaxy of

Marxisms, each contesting for the hegemonic position on a left that exerted at least a 'weak' cultural hegemony in the society at large.

In its turn, this rich field of dissent provided inspiration for oppositional forces around the world, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s. Such prestige derived not only from the slow discovery of the scope of Gramsci's legacy, but also from the sense of a living tradition that was moving forward; unlike its minoritarian and academic variants in other postwar cultures, Marxism in Italy seemed to maintain something closer to a classical unity of theory and practice. The extent to which the international left's debates in recent years have been refracted through the lenses of renewed francophilia in the anglosphere can lead one to forget that in the immediate postwar period this Italian politico-intellectual formation enjoyed a much more pre-eminent role, even in France itself. As late as 1965, in *For Marx*, Althusser could bemoan 'our "French misery": the stubborn, profound absence of any real *theoretical* culture in the history of the French workers' movement' comparable to the sophistication and radical thought that he found in the ambit of the PCF's sister party beyond the Alps. With the debacle of the 2008 elections, a thirty-year long squandering of this patrimony seemed to have reached its logical conclusion.

First published in 2005 as the second Berlusconi government was nearing its end, Cristina Corradi's *History of Marxisms in Italy* aims to reconstruct the story of this singular culture and to urge its inheritance by a contemporary generation. There already exist a number of significant studies of phases in the development of this intellectual tradition, of individual thinkers or specific theoretical currents. In particular, what might legitimately be regarded, from a theoretical point of view, as the 'golden age' of Marxist theoretical debate in Italy around 1900 has received ample attention over the years from Italian scholars. The life and thought of Gramsci continue to be mined both abroad and, in a new season of studies, in Italy itself; more recently, the tradition of *operaismo* has prompted a number of valuable historical and theoretical investigations; and André Tosel has produced a tentative 'road map' of noteworthy theoretical projects over the last 30 years. Corradi's work is the first study that attempts to provide a totalizing overview of the development of these various Italian Marxisms, both in their theoretical distinctions and in their relative unity as a national tradition, from their origins in the late nineteenth century up to the present day.

A member of Rifondazione comunista, and contributor to such Italian theoretical journals as *Critica marxista*, Corradi performs the admirable task of synthesizing an enormous mass of material in her attempt to provide a coherent narrative of the theoretical reflections inspired by Marx on the Apennine Peninsula. The plural subject announced in the title—*Marxisms* rather than *Marxism*—provides a good sense of the approach of this work,

which is less concerned to identify a purity of genealogical continuity than to explore the richness and diversity of thought that has developed in Italy within, in relation to, and sometimes against the Marxist tradition broadly conceived.

Formally, the work is distinguished by its bibliographical comprehensiveness and principle of 'hospitable' exposition and assessment. Corradi not only assembles all the primary sources of the many protagonists in the drama, but also provides the reader with an overview of the most significant interpretations and secondary studies, largely domestic. Her account thus reveals very different currents and undercurrents of Marxist thought in Italy from those more immediately recognizable by a contemporary anglophone audience. The sheer range of authors discussed, many of whom remain unavailable in English translation, or only in deforming selections, hints at a richness elaborated in the intense political cultures of the Italian anomaly—in stark contrast to the paucity its current normalization rewards and promotes. Similarly, Corradi proceeds with a generous respect for the positions of the various writers, allowing them to come forward in their own words with liberal quotation, and taking pains to ensure a fair presentation of their thought on its own terms in a refreshingly non-dogmatic spirit—even, and perhaps especially, when she dissents from their politico-theoretical proposals. For these reasons alone, Corradi's work will undoubtedly become a benchmark for all serious studies of the subject.

The primary thesis of *Storia dei marxismi in Italia*, as Corradi forcefully states in her introduction, is that in Italy during the last thirty years, 'despite the diffusion of an acritical and vulgar Marxophobia, a theoretical Marxism has continued to live, little noted but quite lively'—and quite contrary to traditional interpretations. The promise of hitherto unnoticed renewals tantalizes the reader's curiosity; but before coming to a discussion of some of these novel elements and their historical background, it is worth noting the precise politico-theoretical target of this intervention. The declension of recent 'post-Marxisms'—in the sense of 'non' or 'anti'—has differed in different cultures, sometimes more aggressive and polemical, sometimes more scholastic and theoretical. The Italian variant has the distinction of combining both: Machiavelli's lion and fox fused in a sophisticated cynicism, when not boiling over into an uncouth sarcasm.

One figure in particular can be regarded as personifying this movement to a spectacular degree, because he previously embodied its opposite: Lucio Colletti. It was Colletti who, having made a distinctively powerful contribution to the postwar revival of Marxist theory in Italy, eventually declared the incapacity not only of historically existing Marxism but of Marx himself, under any guise, to provide 'scientific knowledge'. A rational and efficacious politics would thus need to seek out alternative sources of inspiration. Colletti's

renegacy was felt even more acutely by the wider Marxist culture, precisely because he had been one of its 'best men'. Following a long odyssey from the anti-Stalinist Communist left to the disintegrating culture of the Socialist Party, he finished his life, ignobly, as a functionary of Berlusconiism.

Corradi, in what might be described—echoing Engels's and Gramsci's precursors—as an *Anti-Colletti*, is concerned to argue against such precipitous claims of the death of Marxism due to a supposedly fundamental theoretical incoherence. By and large, she succeeds in making a case for significant, if modest, forms of continuity and renewal. She also, however, sets out to show in what ways the 'end' of Marxism *tout court* that Colletti thought to prefigure with his personal departure was not as novel or definitive as he supposed. Viewed in a certain historical optic, it can be regarded as a conjunctural repetition of a gesture that accompanied Italian Marxism throughout the twentieth century, from Croce onwards: namely, the foundation, disavowal and subsequent refoundation of various Marxisms, both theoretical and political, from one generation to the next, necessitated by a deep anxiety as to how to produce a satisfactory translation of the old Moor's thought into Italian realities. Corradi's gambit, then, is to suggest that under contemporary conditions of historical amnesia, an excavation of the itinerary of the past can help us to identify tendencies in the present that may be critical heirs to the strengths of this tradition, while also addressing the historical weaknesses and blindspots that were peremptorily declared to be insurmountable.

The work is divided into three parts, organized in broadly chronological fashion. The first section, 'Labriola to Gramsci (1895–1937)', introduces the reader to the origins of Marxism in post-Risorgimento Italy. It focuses in particular upon the crucial role of Antonio Labriola and the subsequent debates around the turn of the century—joined by Croce, Sorel, Gentile and Mondolfo, among others—regarding the philosophical and scientific status of the fledgling *Weltanschauung*. Corradi highlights in this context the difficult reception of *Capital* in early Italian Marxism, destined, according to the author, to play a decisive role of 'underdetermination' in the subsequent development of the various traditions. (A complete translation of Volume 1 was only produced after World War Two, although an abridged version had appeared in 1886. The *Manifesto* was translated in 1889. The popularizing texts of Engels, alongside the 1859 'Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy', were the primary vehicles of diffusion of the critique of political economy in the Italian idiom.)

While Corradi hints at the relation between Marxist theory and socialist politics as the horizon of these debates, the reader quickly becomes aware that the book's focus will remain firmly upon theoretical developments, rather than political organizations and positions. Nevertheless, Corradi does attempt to situate these developments historically, arguing that the first

'crisis of Marxism' in the late nineteenth century, like its reiteration almost a hundred years later, should be related to theoretical inquiry's subordination to transformations in the mode of production, accepting the existing state of affairs rather than striving to achieve critical domination of it. Neo-idealism is presented as just such a subaltern retreat, resulting in what can perhaps be regarded as the first genuine 'post-Marxism'—that is, an attempted superannuation rather than mere negation, embodied above all in Croce's sophisticated 'post-Marxist' liberalism. This established an enduring hegemony, against which later attempts to repropose 'another Italian Marxism' continually needed to struggle. Here, the non-Italian and particularly the anglophone reader can note a first, refreshingly estranging element: the normal cathartic tales of teleological progression from a Marxism to a post-Marxism have less purchase on the history of Italian Marxism, so much of which was to find itself already doubly posterior, as a critique of a critique.

Corradi then proceeds to assess Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* primarily in terms of the challenge his work posed to the theoretical foundations of the neo-idealist matrix, through its conjugation of the legacy of the later Lenin with the renewal of a warm Labriolian current. She focuses here in particular upon Gramsci's translation and interpretation of the *Theses on Feuerbach* as a revindication of the philosophical autonomy of Marxism, a necessary correlate to the political autonomy of a hegemonic project of the subaltern classes. Yet while Gramsci's carceral labours bequeathed an inheritance of unprecedented proportions to the postwar Italian Communist Party, it was never fully assumed, when not squandered or spoiled. Indeed, a noticeable element in Corradi's further narrative is the extent to which many later Italian Marxisms—such as, in particular, *operaismo*—consciously established a distance from the Sardinian thinker, due to his perceived association with a PCI orthodoxy that arguably remained more Crocean than Gramscian in its political reflexes.

The second part of the book charts the rebirth of Italian Marxist theory after the fall of Fascism, from liberation through to 1989. Historicism, from Togliatti's 'orthodox' reading of Gramsci to Cesare Luporini and Nicola Badaloni; Dellavolpism, which includes Colletti and Mario Rossi; and *operaismo*—from Raniero Panzieri to Mario Tronti, Massimo Cacciari and Negri—constitute the three main paradigms that Corradi explores in this period. She also includes reference, however, to the contributions of particularly significant dissenting figures, such as the 'critical rationalism' of partisan Antonio Banfi or the *marxismo-leopardismo* of Sebastiano Timpanaro; to later syncretic developments like the 'first' neo-Gramscianism; and to independent thinkers not easily assimilable to any of these currents, such as the political economist Claudio Napoleoni.

The major figures of this period will still be familiar to many readers, at least by name. It is immediately notable, however, just how little of their work has become available internationally. Luporini's fascinating development—from existentialism to historicism to structuralism and beyond, reaching a high point in the classic *Dialettica e materialismo* (1974)—remains a closed book to the English reading public. Badaloni's important work on Gramsci and *Capital* is largely unrecognized. Panzieri's ground-breaking interventions in *Quaderni rossi*, Tronti's militant *Operai e capitale* (sometimes referred to as the 'bible' of *operaismo*) and Cacciari's explorations of 'negative thought' in *Pensiero negativo e razionalizzazione* are represented in English by only a smattering of articles. Rossi's massive study of the origins of Marx's thought from the early 1960s is known only to specialists. For the contemporary reader, this part of the book brings both astonishment at the richness and breadth of Marxist thinking in Italy in this period—less a distinct intellectual current than a kaleidoscopic perspective onto modern thought in its totality—and a simultaneous sense of frustration at the failure to translate so much of this stimulating work at the time, particularly into English. Denied a wider diffusion at the moment of their conjunctural inception, it now seems unlikely that many of these classics will ever receive the international attention they deserve, as elements of the global left's common heritage.

Corradi's compelling narrative of the development and conflict between these different positions on the 'Italian road to socialism', their fertile interaction and lack of mutual recognition, gives further cause for regret at missed encounters. For if the debates instigated by Labriola's insistence on the philosophical autonomy of Marxism at the end of the nineteenth century constituted the 'golden age' of Italian Marxist theory, the conjuncture of the postwar period can perhaps be characterized as its 'heroic age'. These decades witnessed a veritable explosion of theoretical creativity and energy, rivalled in terms of productivity and complexity by other European Marxisms of the period, such as the newly repatriated Frankfurt school, but outstripping them in terms of expansiveness, militancy and, above all, a sense of conscious renewal of a tradition rather than maudlin reflection on its decline.

Such theoretical sophistication, however, was not accompanied by any political disengagement. On the contrary, as Corradi herself only partially indicates, almost all the protagonists in these intense years, not least those working in the academy (always a more directly politicized field in Italy, at any rate), were active militants in political organizations ranging from the left of the Socialist Party to the PCI to the various groupuscules of an extensive far left. Even the most seemingly abstract—to the foreign eye—propositions, such as the thesis of the 'autonomy of the political' and its culture of *Krisis*, proposed by Tronti and Cacciari in the 1970s, were consciously designed

as politico-theoretical interventions in the organizational disputes of those years. The political retreats, descending from historical compromises in the 1970s to the implosion of the 1980s and beyond, Corradi suggests, should also be tracked in the register of retreats from attempts to elaborate coherently the respective traditions and overcome their internal contradictions. Indeed, Corradi goes so far as to argue that the failure to stem the tide at the intellectual and ideological level contributed in significant ways to the depth of the later disaggregation of the Italian left's entire political culture.

The third part of the book, entitled 'Critical Assessments and Reconstructive Projects', traces attempts at continuity and revision from the 1980s and 1990s, dealing with authors who remain active today. If many of the *dramatis personae* of the previous sections are broadly familiar on the international terrain, albeit more often in the historical memory of an older generation rather than as current reference points, the same cannot be said for the majority of Corradi's contemporary reconstructive protagonists. These will be *terra incognita* for many non-Italians. The proximity of this period also means that judgements must necessarily be more tentative, chaff more easily mistaken for wheat, or proportions misjudged. While one can disagree with Corradi's particular emphases and assessments, this section of the book nevertheless has the merit of courageously attempting to write up a provisional balance sheet of the present, as a point of orientation for the future. Overall, Corradi successfully demonstrates her main thesis that, at least at the theoretical level, in stark contrast to the political and organizational, these have not been 'years of lead' for Italian Marxism. Albeit in minoritarian forms, against a hostile mainstream and often from precarious and marginalized positions, a significant number of serious thinkers have attempted to remain true to the traditions in which their thought was formed, inheriting them in the form of a conscious self-critique and transformation.

This narrative begins with an overview of the development of Negri's thought, tracking his path out of 'classical' workerism that would eventually issue in *Empire* and its sequels. The fact that an increasing amount of this work has found its way into English over the last years stands in stark contrast to the fate of Negri's near-contemporaries, which constitutes the subject matter of the remainder of the book. The work of the Turinese philosopher Costanzo Preve, born in 1943, is a revealing case. Though present in some other continental cultures, his attempted refoundation of Marxism through a synthesis of Lukács and Althusser, with a strong emphasis upon philosophical anthropology, has yet to find a wider reception; his extensive bibliography includes works such as *Il filo di Arianna: Quindici lezioni di filosofia marxista* (1990), *Hegel, Marx, Heidegger* (1999) and *Marx inattuale: Eredità e prospettiva* (2004).

However, the work of intellectual historian Domenico Losurdo, born in Bari, 1941, is slowly gaining the international recognition it deserves, particularly his ground-breaking studies, *Heidegger and the Ideology of War: Community, Death and the West* (2001; original, 1991) and *Hegel and the Freedom of Moderns* (2004; 1992); his monumental intellectual biography, *Nietzsche, il ribelle aristocratico* (2002), reviewed in NLR 31, is now available in German. Losurdo proposes a novel reassessment of the positive role of Hegel's thought in the development of the Marxist tradition, urging a reconsideration of the thesis of the extinction of the state and emphasizing the decisive contribution of anti-colonial struggles to the elaboration of a concretely universalist theory of emancipation. Historical studies of *Antonio Gramsci dal liberalismo al 'comunismo critico'* and Italian Neo-Hegelianism, *Dai fratelli Spaventa a Gramsci*, both 1997, sit beside more contemporary interventions in this extensive oeuvre. Among Losurdo's most recent works have been the acclaimed *Controstoria del liberalismo* (2005) and *Il linguaggio dell'Impero: Lessico dell'ideologia americana* (2007).

The core of this final section, however, is constituted by reference to the renewal of the critique of political economy and the emergence on Italian soil, after many false starts, of Marxisms that might legitimately claim to be 'Marxisms of Capital'. Corradi detects significant coherent elaborations of Marx's thought in the works of Gianfranco La Grassa (born in Conegliano, 1935) and his sometime collaborator Maria Turchetto (born in Belluno, 1953), and, in a slightly different sense, Riccardo Bellofiore (born in Arezzo, 1953). La Grassa and Turchetto, initially inspired by the Althusserian moment and the work of Bettelheim, attempted to respond to the so-called 'crisis of Marxism' in the late 1970s and 1980s with a return to a focus on the social relations of production and the labour process: from circulation back to production and to the disjointed transitions in social formations that it determines. Principal works in this research include *Quale marxismo in crisi?* (1979) by La Grassa, Turchetto and Franco Soldani, and La Grassa's *Il valore come astrazione del lavoro* (1980). More recently, Turchetto's directorship of the Associazione Louis Althusser has issued in a series of collaborative studies exploring a refoundation of Marxism's epistemological and scientific status.

The work of political economist Bellofiore, on the other hand, has been concerned to demonstrate how a rethinking of Marx can respond to the challenges of contemporary economic orthodoxy; 'Marx after monetarism' might be one way of describing this wide-ranging project, initially inspired by Napoleoni (on whom Bellofiore wrote a book in 1991). Beyond his animating role in the International Symposium on Marxian Theory, he is also a regular contributor to the Italian left-wing press and was a collaborator with the unfortunately now defunct *Rivista del Manifesto*. Bellofiore has engaged in a detailed re-reading of Marx, submitting key concepts of the Italian

workerist tradition in particular to critical scrutiny. He has also, however, undertaken a critical assessment of Sraffa—an edited volume appeared in 1986—and is known internationally for his work on the legacy of Minsky, *Financial Keynesianism and Market Instability* (two edited volumes with Piero Ferri, 2001), and on Rosa Luxemburg (2009). Indeed, it is noticeable that of all the figures explored in this final section of the book, Bellofiore is perhaps the most recognized outside of Italy—due, perhaps, to the greater degree of integration of economics as a discipline into the reigning transatlantic cosmopolitanism, as its *lingua franca*, in comparison to the paradoxical provincialization today of discourses such as philosophy or history, despite their traditionally more universalistic claims.

The volume concludes with an extended consideration of the novel reading of Hegel and Marx by Roberto Finelli, focused upon the capacity of a renewed reading of *Capital* to decipher the hieroglyphs of postmodernity. Born in Rome in 1945, and now working there again after a period spent in the south, Finelli's intellectual development includes not only studies of the young Hegel (*Mito e critica delle forme: La giovinezza di Hegel*, 1996), Marx (*Astrazione e dialettica dal romanticismo al capitalismo*, 1987; *Un patricidio mancato*, 2004) and classics of Western and Italian Marxism such as Labriola, Gramsci, Della Volpe, Colletti and Althusser, but also an extended engagement with psychoanalysis. While such a bibliography might seem to indicate a return to more 'classically' Western Marxist themes, Corradi argues that Finelli's emphasis upon a reading of *Capital* in terms of a dialectic of abstraction rather than contradiction provides the theoretical preconditions for the refoundation of an Italian theoretical Marxism adequate to the times, as a critique of the political economy of contemporary capitalism. Some have judged her treatment of his work to be disproportionate in comparison to the space dedicated to other participants in Italy's contemporary Marx Renaissance, thereby perhaps obscuring both the strengths and limitations of Finelli's work itself. While Corradi's closing emphasis reveals a certain partisanship—undoubtedly derived from her former collaboration with Finelli at the University of Bari—it does have the merit of providing her conclusion with a forceful restatement of her initial thesis that the history of Italian Marxisms should be comprehended not only, *à la* Colletti, in terms of its exhausted past, but also in terms of the capacity of its themes to be re-proposed in the novel forms of a still open-ended present.

It is perhaps too easy to identify the obvious limitations of this work, many of which may be attributable to the space constraints imposed by commercial publishing on what is already, at over 400 pages, a substantial tome by today's standards. Nevertheless, the striking nature of Corradi's project, as a first attempt to see the history of Marxism in Italy as a whole and to see it well, invites discussions of limitations in her approach, in anticipation

of future essays in the field. Paradoxically, or perhaps appropriately, these problems can be viewed as the risks implicit in the strengths of the book's main thesis and organization.

A first consideration concerns the theoretical and historical presuppositions of the book. Following an internationally diffused recent tendency, Corradi sometimes seems to posit an originary 'Marxist' discourse to be found, above all, in *Capital*, comprehended primarily as a totalizing social theory of modernity. Having suffered a series of deformations in the course of its repeated attempted translations into the Italian vernacular, this 'hard core' awaits the long peregrination at its end point—a transcendent measure, which Italian Marxisms must strive to meet. There is something to be said for this narrative, as a salutary corrective within a Marxist culture more often given to 'politician' exaggerations than to a coherent elaboration of the critique of political economy. Corradi is certainly correct to emphasize that Marx's *magnum opus*, far from being beset by irresolvable theoretical contradictions, still awaits its most productive reading—even more urgently today, in a period of global economic crisis. On the other hand, a very different tale could be told of these 'historically existing Marxisms', as experiments in the impurity of historical political practice. The 'theoretical fragilities', as Corradi phrases it, of these Marxisms *sans Capital*—though arguably much less 'without' the critique of political economy than Corradi's polemical framing tends to suppose—may themselves have been indices of relative strengths on other terrains, particularly those of political theory and organization. In their turn, these strengths helped to redefine the conditions of the 'visible' in Marx's work itself, in a way that did not occur in other national left traditions denied such trials by fire, if we are to judge by the unusually large number of 'varieties of Marxism' that came forth from this laboratory. Whatever the case, it seems unlikely that a Marxism of *Capital* alone will be enough to resolve the deadlocks of the Italian left; something more in keeping with Gramsci's emphasis on the necessity of a politics of truth and the courage of political and moral leadership would seem to be a necessary counter to the compromises of a culture of opportunism.

A second consideration, stemming from the first, concerns the selection of the authors and traditions treated, and the relative weight accorded to them. Of course, a project of this nature and ambition will necessarily prompt dissenting voices of various degrees of stridency, and has indeed already been contested in a firm but comradely manner in Italy itself. While Corradi provides ample treatment of a wide range of figures, there are some notable absences, whose inclusion might have provided a slightly different tone to the book's overall analysis, and its conclusions in particular. Amadeo Bordiga is perhaps the most significant of these: a ferocious critic of Stalinism from the outset, intransigent ultra-leftist opponent of

parliamentary deviations and novel theorist of the tyranny of the capitalist labour process, the mention of his name, revealingly, still has the capacity to prompt a Wittgensteinian silence in some areas of the Italian left. Similarly, the theoretical contributions of the Italian Trotskyist traditions, particularly that of Livio Maitan, a formative influence for many in the Italian student movement in the 1960s, are less prominent than they deserve to be. Beyond the central Trontian-Negrian axis of *operaismo*, the inclusion of figures such as Mariarosa Dalla Costa, an animating force behind a debate on the status of domestic labour that had a significant international echo in the New Left of the 1970s, would have provided a fuller picture of the diversity of this current and of the contributions of a wider socialist-feminist culture to the development of Marxism in Italy.

From within or close to the culture of the old PCI, one might wish for more mention of Valentino Gerratana, not only the assiduous editor of Gramsci but also a significant theorist in his own right; or of Ludovico Geymonat, editor of a monumental *History of Philosophical and Scientific Thought* and author of a novel interpretation of dialectical materialism. Still within the broader communist culture, one could regret the absence of a more extended consideration of the contribution made by the group gathered around the newspaper *Il Manifesto* (and formerly also its associated journal) to debates in political theory, particularly in the crucial years of the late 1970s 'crisis of Marxism', announced by Althusser at a *Manifesto* conference in Venice. Future surveys might also wish to consider contributions by younger figures, not all of whom lie outside the temporal bounds of Corradi's narrative. Among these one might include the philological and historical studies of Gramsci by figures associated with the International Gramsci Society, among them the philosopher Fabio Frosini and political theorist Guido Liguori. Similarly, the projects of the political philosopher Massimiliano Tomba or the political economist Roberto Fineschi, which aim to reassess traditional Italian readings of Marx in the light of the new material made available by the *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe*, would seem likely candidates for inclusion in Corradi's narrative; as would, in a different vein, philosopher Vittorio Morfino's innovative readings of Spinoza and the late Althusser in the perspective of a refounded historical materialism. Of course, such lists of symptomatic absences could be extended almost indefinitely, depending upon the individual compiler's predispositions. Corradi's precise emphasis upon transformative continuity as the criterion for inclusion in her narrative, however, challenges such contenders to provide a selective tradition that would be similarly capable of reproposing itself today.

A third consideration, and perhaps more substantive limitation, derives from Corradi's focus on the history of Italian Marxisms as a relatively unified national tradition, even in its internal divisions. The strengths of this

approach have already been noted; yet it might still legitimately be asked: what can they know of Italian Marxism who only Italian Marxism know? As the overall narrative of this study makes clear, the tradition developed a consciously internationalist perspective from its origins, and not only in the period of the PCI's self-imposed subordination to Moscow. Labriola corresponded with Engels; Gramsci, participant in the early debates of the Third International, contributed a chapter to Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution*, and later in prison devoured a reading list of international scope; early workerism developed in dialogue with other continental currents of the anti-Stalinist left and also, as Steve Wright's *Storming Heaven* documents, with the experiences of North American trade unionism. Althusser regularly intervened in Italian debates; Negri's later work is strongly marked by his contact in exile with currents in French post-structuralism; some contemporary 'anglophone' Marxist theorists, such as Giovanni Arrighi or Guglielmo Carchedi, began their careers at home before transferring elsewhere. This is to say that Italian Marxisms, despite or perhaps precisely because of their firm rooting in an anomalous national terrain, were always fractured in their development by contact with foreign influences. They were reflective in this sense of the broader internal dislocations of Italian society, which was one of the few continental cultures in the twentieth century to register fully the impact both of immigration and emigration—departures and returns, in both literal and metaphorical senses—on its national life.

A contemporary example of the theoretical limits of a purely 'Italian road' to Marx, for instance, can be found in Corradi's treatment of the theme of real abstraction in the interpretation of *Capital*. While Bellofiore and Finelli have undoubtedly made decisive advances over ambiguities and contradictions in the formulations of Della Volpe, Colletti and Napoleoni, it seems arbitrary to assess the coherence of their proposals in isolation from other contemporary figures working in the same field, deriving from very different national and political traditions: Geert Reuten in the Netherlands, Chris Arthur in England, or Michael Heinrich and Helmut Reichelt in Germany. Precisely because they share a common set of references with numerous other radical currents in different national traditions, the assessment of these Italian contributions as *Marxisms*, in the successes and failures of their respective inheritances and betrayals, could perhaps only be fully conducted in a more expansive optic.

A fourth consideration concerns the relative absence of politics as such in Corradi's treatment—probably the most puzzling element for her foreign audience. Despite the work's title, and as the reader has undoubtedly already discerned, this is in reality a history of *theoretical* Marxisms in Italy, rather than of those Marxisms in their totality, as simultaneously theoretical, political, social and cultural movements. The text refers at various times

to particularly significant turning points in Italian political life; but these remain largely external to the main course of the narrative, which is more concerned to track the laborious 'march of the concept'. Limitations of space and the focused polemical nature of the main argument may have played a role here. The reasonable calculation that an Italian readership would be aware of its general twentieth-century political history but, given the widespread suppression of explicitly Marxist discourses in contemporary Italian universities, would know little of these theoretical adventures, could also be offered as justification for omission of what was presumed to be obvious, in favour of what is all too often ignored.

On the other hand, the nature of Corradi's field of study would seem to demand a more integral treatment of the interaction between politics and theory. This is not only due to the fact that Marxism in general has properly aimed for something more than hegemony in the seminar room. It is also owed to the peculiar nature of the development of Marxist theory in Italy. This was a land where Marxism as a popular 'conception of the world', in Gramsci's sense, developed as a reaction against a decidedly scholastic post-Marxism, rather than the reverse; where philosophical disputes represented not a retreat from politics but its continuation by other means; where the borders between 'activist' and 'academic' variants were more porous, if not dissolved. The theoretical constructions examined by Corradi were also, in part, interventions into concrete political conjunctures in the 'trenches' of the Italian social formation. Future studies may need to attempt to assess them in a more immanent fashion, in terms of how they responded to the demands of their age as complicated forms of theoretico-political practice.

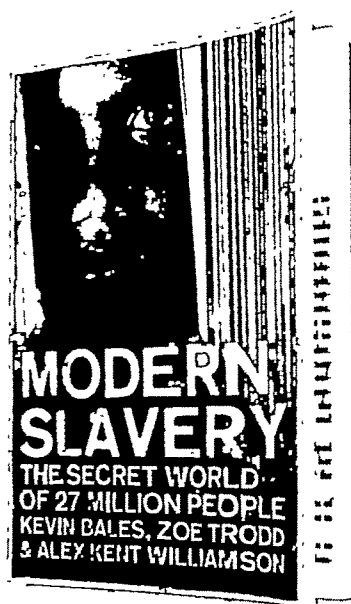
Following Corradi's principle of hospitable exposition, however, another, more generous reading of the political dimensions of this study is possible. Surveying the directly political role that the marginalization of the galaxy of Italian Marxisms played in the normalization of the Italian exception, she ironically notes that 'a tailor-made history [*storia a disegno*] has been styled for Italian Marxism, a story oriented towards a final crisis that would even prefigure the fall of real socialism'. A supposed theoretical weakness was posited—of course, retrospectively—as a historical failure's determining and corrupted essence; its 'appearance' in 1989 could then be presented as confirmation of a definitively completed cycle. By aiming to recover the real history of this movement in its contingency and fragilities, Corradi's labours issue a challenge to theoretical fashions which embody ideological operations aimed not only against Marxist theory but against the contemporary left as a whole. Fated to a necessary repetition of its foundational weakness, rejection of the status quo can only figure in this narrative as nostalgic residue of an antediluvian world now irrevocably lost—in a strict

sense, as ahistorical. By insisting that very different 'ends' are being found in those beginnings, this study restores something of the openness of real history, beyond its convenient closure.

It is in this sense, finally, that Corradi's study can be taken as representative of a more general recent tendency, towards what might be described as a Marxist 'post-Western Marxism' among a younger generation of European political intellectuals. Often excluded from university posts (like Corradi herself), and largely ignored by the reigning transatlantic intellectual consensus, these researchers have identified the historical and theoretical exploration of the strengths and weaknesses of the traditions descending from Marx as one of the ways in which we might gain a critical vantage point on the all too contemporary. Critical excavation of the past is not, of course, 'refoundation'; Benjaminian *rettende Kritik* provides no guarantees of future combative programmatic reconstruction. Given the richness of the material that Corradi has uncovered, however, and her skill in presenting this work in a synthetic form for a new generation, one should perhaps not underestimate the extent to which such a historical mode may yet provide resources for resisting the becoming-future of the present.

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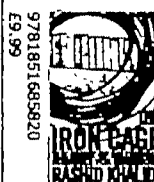
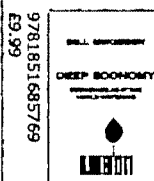
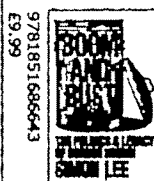
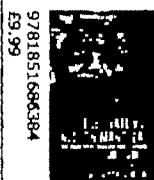
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Michael Reid, *Forgotten Continent: The Battle for Latin America's Soul*
 Yale University Press: London and New Haven 2007, £19.99, hardback
 400 pp, 978 0 300 11616 8

TONY WOOD

LATIN AMERICA TAMED?

From the streets of Buenos Aires to the highlands of Chiapas, from the Bolivian *altiplano* to the *barrios* of Caracas, the last two decades have produced a vibrant and varied series of oppositions to the neoliberal doctrines that were implemented across Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s. The impression of a leftward continental drift was seemingly confirmed by a string of electoral successes for nominally progressive forces: after Chávez in 1998 came Lula in 2002, followed in the next six years by Kirchner, Tabaré Vázquez, Morales, Bachelet, Ortega, Correa and Lugo—a trend that prompted many to announce the demise of the Washington Consensus, and to ask whether Latin America might turn from being its privileged victim to its chief gravedigger.

Michael Reid's *Forgotten Continent* is expressly designed to counter such illusions. Far from being discredited, in Reid's view the policies of the Washington Consensus were responsible for substantial improvements in the region's economic position. Though much maligned, it is they that have enabled Latin America to experience stability in recent years, and to begin to close the gap dividing it from the developed world. But if the gains made in the 1990s are to be consolidated, Reid argues, there must be continuity in economic policy and, above all, political stability to ensure a predictable environment for investors, domestic and foreign. The principal burden of his book is to make the case for persevering with the economic recipes of the 1990s, and for a politics of consensus that would prevent any damaging polarizations along class or ideological lines. As models for this brand of pragmatism Reid cites the governments of Lula and the Concertación coalition of Chile, representatives of a left-of-centre 'democratic reformism' that

needs to be distinguished from the 'populist autocracy' of Chávez. The latter, in Reid's view, poses a serious threat to the region, his redistributive policies a temptation to which electorates must not succumb if the progress made in recent decades is to be preserved and extended.

The remedies offered by Chávez and his imitators are unsustainable in the long run, argues Reid, and can only set Latin America further back on its slow road to prosperity. But he also insists that the region's rulers must undercut the appeal of such measures by tackling in earnest the vast inequalities that have provided populism with its fuel—and which have also acted as a brake on development. It is here that the Washington Consensus is in need of some refurbishment, according to Reid, since it failed sufficiently to emphasize the need for equity alongside growth. Governments in Brazil, Chile, Mexico and elsewhere have sensibly remained committed to the principal macroeconomic tenets of the 1990s; they must now seek to combine this stance with judicious, 'targeted' social spending that will enable them 'to create greater political and socio-economic equity without endangering the conditions for profitable private investment and thus for sustainable economic growth'.

Written between 2004 and 2007, *Forgotten Continent* is the product of Reid's first-hand experience of the neoliberal ascendancy in the region. A member of the London squatters' movement in the 70s—radical sympathies he has obviously jettisoned since—Reid travelled to Latin America in the 1980s, and reported on Peru for the BBC, *Guardian* and *Economist*. He joined the staff of the latter in 1990 to cover first Mexico and Central America, then Brazil, before returning to London to edit its 'Americas' section in 1999. No surprise, then, that much of the book echoes the tone of the *Economist*—the text is peppered with magazine-style evocations of dusty Oaxacan villages or the 'grubby, dynamic chaos' of the *conos* of Lima, and selected locals are ventriloquized to add human interest to various of Reid's points ('people are living a little better nowadays, conceded Panfilo Santiago, the municipal councillor in charge of education'). But *Forgotten Continent* does more than simply transfer to a broader canvas the arguments Reid deploys on a weekly basis in his day job. It is written with a pressing sense of ideological purpose: to guard against the unravelling of the good work done in the 1990s, and to bolster mainstream certainties that may have been shaken by the Argentine default or the radical turn in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador.

In that sense, it represents the summation of a new consensus on Latin America—a status amply reflected in the book's reception in establishment circles, where it has been the object of uniform approval. The dust-jacket boasts enthusiastic puffs from Fernando Henrique Cardoso—'insightful', 'a must-read'—and Jorge Castañeda: 'both a necessary tool and a delightful read'; James Dunkerley adds his endorsement too, calling the book 'formidably

well informed'. Reviews in the Anglophone press have been similarly laudatory: in the UK it has been deemed 'scholarly' and 'meticulous' (*Guardian*), 'persuasive' and 'powerful' (*FT*); in the US, 'brilliantly researched' (*New York Times*), 'not likely to be superseded for some time' (*Weekly Standard*), and 'comprehensive and erudite' (*Washington Post*). Col. McKay of the US Naval Institute insisted that the Obama administration's hemispheric 'decision makers' have this 'excellent work on their must-read list', while in *Foreign Affairs*, Francis Fukuyama concluded that 'Reid is clearly right that a battle for Latin America's soul is unfolding today'.

The moralizing urgency behind Reid's sonorous subtitle is intended to convey a sense of frustration with Western policy-makers, whom he believes to have 'forgotten' an entire continent amid the distractions of Iraq and the War on Terror. This too seems to be an article of faith for writers of the Anglo-Saxon establishment: thus Fukuyama observed in *Foreign Affairs* that 'eyes immediately glaze over' at the mere mention of the region, while in *Foreign Policy* in May 2006, former Venezuelan trade minister Moisés Naím anticipated Reid by declaring that Latin America had become 'Atlantis—the lost continent', having 'disappeared from the maps of investors, generals, diplomats and journalists'. Naím's article is in fact one of a number of fore-runners to Reid in the elaboration of the new consensus: it too praises Lula and Lagos as 'models of more responsible economic governance', and argues for 'tempered' solutions to Latin America's ills; apparently, the region's 'most important deficit is patience'. In their 2004 edited volume *After the Washington Consensus*, John Williamson and Pedro-Pablo Kuczynski—respectively, the British codifier of the Washington Consensus and a former Peruvian prime minister—likewise advocated 'patience', and the need to pursue 'realistic' policies 'steadfastly'; though they also recommend 'paying more attention to the social agenda'. In 2006, OECD economist Javier Santiso similarly endorsed Lula's and Lagos's pragmatic accommodations to the economic status quo, in his evocatively titled *The Political Economy of the Possible*.

Jorge Castañeda, meanwhile, made an important intervention the same year by proposing, in a *Foreign Affairs* article, a distinction between two Latin American lefts—one 'modern, open-minded, reformist', the other 'nationalist', 'strident' and populist—and urging that Western policy-makers support the former and work to contain the latter. Long before this, of course, Castañeda had concluded in *Utopia Unarmed* (1993) that 'the moderate left's only true leverage' was 'being a lesser evil', and that 'the only thing left to fight for is a future that is simply the present, plus more of the same'. Since Reid's book appeared, such views have been buttressed by a volume entitled *Falling Behind* (2008), edited by Fukuyama, who exhorts Latin America to 'follow sensible economic policies' while also 'constructing smart social policies' to deal with inequality, which remains 'a source of political instability'.

Forgotten Continent, then, fits squarely within an existing body of received opinion. But it also represents perhaps the clearest expression of the emergent *pensée unique* on Latin America—marked by a familiar blend of pious anti-poverty rhetoric with unstinting support for the prerogatives of foreign investors and domestic elites, together with a relentless emphasis on the need to keep politics firmly within the confines of the reigning orthodoxy. At the same time, it purports to hold lessons for the wider world: according to Reid, 'it is hard to overstate what is at stake' in the struggle between liberal democracy and radical populism. Indeed, 'the region has become one of the world's most important and testing laboratories for the viability of democratic capitalism as a global project'. All the more reason, then, to take Reid's arguments seriously, and to sketch out some counter-arguments to the refurbished consensus for which he aims to provide a new basis.

While the core of the book concerns the period since the end of the Cold War, Reid seeks to give weight to his case by setting his arguments in geographical and historical context. He opens with an outline of the main features of each Latin American country, starting with the two demographic and economic 'giants', Brazil and Mexico, moving through the relatively developed Southern Cone states of Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, and then a sequence of poorer countries with large indigenous populations: Paraguay and the Andean states of Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru. Next he turns to the Caribbean basin: paramilitarized Colombia, petro-populist Venezuela, the Cold War battlegrounds of Central America, the creole island twins of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, and the Cuban exception. The US too makes an appearance as an honorary Latin American country, now that some 40 million people of Latino descent live there. Throughout this journey, Reid proffers serial banalities by way of local colour ('it is perhaps the national football team, with its almost unbeatably stubborn defence, which expresses the essence of Paraguayan identity').

He then attends to the conundrum of why Latin America has for so long lagged behind the developed world. Here he tackles—and dismisses—the prevalent explanations, displaying particular irritation when it comes to dependency theory. A series of historical chapters then covers the period from 19th-century independence to 1989, providing a reductive and tendentious account in which the complex interaction of social, economic and political forces is simplified into a series of binaries: Latin America's history should be seen as 'a contest, between modernizers and reactionaries, between democrats and authoritarians, between the privileged and the excluded'. In Reid's frankly bizarre re-reading of the Cold War period, 'reformers of varying hues' were obstructed by 'polarization', as radicals on left and right alike failed to compromise—paving the way for a wave of military coups which, Reid assures us, had little or nothing to do with the US.

The book's central chapters cover the implementation and outcomes of the Washington Consensus itself, the 'populist challenge' from Chávez, and the 'reformist response' from Brazil, Chile and Mexico. Three thematic chapters follow, portraying the transformation for the better of Latin American societies, states and political systems in the last three decades. In conclusion Reid discusses the region's isolated world position—apparently neglected by US and EU alike—and reasons, nonetheless, for a guarded optimism, against the 'persistent denial of progress by many academics, journalists and politicians'. These latter portions of the book contain a good deal of factual material—carefully selected to support Reid's case, of course—but they in essence repeat, from different angles, the four main propositions that form the heart of his argument. I will set these out in turn, before offering an alternative perspective on each.

Reid's first key assertion concerns the positive effects of the Washington Consensus, the principal tenets of which were codified in 1990 by Williamson—who was later to lament his choice of name as 'a propaganda gift to the old left'. Reid boils Williamson's original ten-point recipe down to three main elements: macroeconomic stabilization, liberalization and privatization. If the first was a means for taming the inflation that plagued Latin America in the 1980s, the second would dismantle protectionist barriers and open the way for trade and investment, while the third would ensure goods and services were allocated through market mechanisms. Reid's narrative tracks the progress made across the region in each of these three areas. Stabilization was achieved by scaling back deficits and slashing public spending, while renegotiation of external debts under the Brady Plan brought renewed access to capital markets. Liberalization of trade and finance, too, was a success: Reid notes approvingly that 'by the end of the 1990s, Latin America was the most open region of the developing world'. It is privatization, however, that came to be most closely identified with the Washington Consensus, and a focal point for opposition in several states. Here the record is one of 'misunderstandings': in Bolivia, the multinational consortium led by Bechtel only raised water charges by '43 per cent on average', and there were 'valid reasons' for this—to discourage wastage', for example. In Reid's view, 'on balance, privatization of public services was clearly positive for Latin America', promoting greater efficiency and increases in productivity while improving infrastructure. But, alas, the benefits were spread thinly, and 'often not very visible', hence privatization's undeserved bad reputation.

In his balance sheet of the Washington Consensus, however, Reid admits that its overall economic record was 'relatively disappointing': growth picked up in the early 1990s, but stagnated from 1998 to 2002, the 'lost half-decade'; the recovery from 2004 onwards, meanwhile, owed much to high commodity

prices. The reason for this underwhelming performance, according to Reid, is that 'too much remained unreformed'—Latin America continues to suffer from technological backwardness, low productivity, excessive regulation, bad transport and weak institutions. The answer, then, is more of the same neoliberal medicine—but this time, with 'a greater emphasis on equity and the role of the state in obtaining it', in line with 'the new consensus being implemented by many governments in Latin America'.

The leading exponents of this new (small-c) consensus—combining 'market and state, growth and social policies' while at the same time 'shielding business from unpleasant surprises'—are Brazil, Chile and Mexico. Praise for the 'democratic reformism' and social policies of these countries is the second key element in Reid's wider case. In all three instances, he portrays a combination of 'effective economic policies' and 'broad political consensus' as preconditions for success. Thus in Brazil, under Lula governments that have adhered to the macroeconomic orthodoxy enshrined by his predecessor, poverty rates decreased and income distribution, as measured by a Gini coefficient, became less unequal. In Chile, the post-dictatorship governments have wisely cleaved to a model whose foundations were laid by Pinochet, achieving some of the highest growth rates in Latin America. Mexico's record is more ambiguous: even after the democratic breakthrough that brought Fox to power in 2000, 'the economy continued to be held back by many vestiges of the corporate state'; but NAFTA has been a positive boon, allowing Mexico to 'diversify its economy'.

It is Mexico that provides the model for the kind of 'targeted' social programmes Reid recommends: the Progres a initiative adopted under Zedillo, renamed Oportunidades under Fox, is a 'conditional cash-transfer' (CCT) scheme that ties parents' benefits to their children's school enrolment. In Brazil, Lula combined several of Cardoso's anti-poverty programmes along similar lines into the Bolsa Família, which by 2006 was paying 11 million families around \$44 a month in cash. It is thanks to macroeconomic prudence that these governments have been able to put such schemes in place; indeed, Reid argues that neoliberal reforms have freed up resources for social spending, 'previously squandered by state-owned companies'. In addition to being more effective, in Reid's view these kinds of state initiative are 'more democratic than the populist programmes of Perón or Chávez' because they are 'based on the notion that every citizen as an *individual*, rather than as a member of a political client group, had a right to education, health and a minimum social safety-net'.

These are the 'reformist' alternatives to the populist temptation incarnated by Chávez, to whom Reid devotes an entire chapter, seeking to develop the third plank of his argument—a critique of the radical left option in Latin America. The bulk of Reid's account here is a narrative of events that repeats

the litany of Venezuela's elites—Chávez's rule is 'less democratic, open and pluralist than that of his predecessors'—while massaging the facts in their favour. Reid claims that by 2001 Chávez had 'managed to arouse a mass opposition movement bent on his overthrow', and 'picked verbal quarrels with interest groups such as the media, the Catholic Church, the trade unions and private business'—though whose interests these interest groups might be representing, and exactly how large this 'mass' movement was, remain unsaid. He also resorts to some deplorable racial scaremongering, observing that Chávez's supporters 'tended to be poorer, darker-skinned Venezuelans . . . linked to him by a quasi-religious bond'.

Mingled in with this essentially ideological exercise, however, are a handful of more substantive points. Reid acknowledges that Chávez's social programmes have had some positive effects—they 'indeed provided the urban poor with services they previously lacked'—but criticizes them for being clientelistic in their operation, opaque in their financing, and 'almost certainly unsustainable'. Moreover, 'given the extraordinary increase in oil revenue, the record of the Chávez government in reducing poverty was not outstanding'—though he refrains from giving any figures. Instead, Reid seeks to dismiss any notion that Chávez might form part of an emergent radical continental bloc: Morales and Correa are mentioned only so as to be distinguished from Chávez, and for the possibility of their countries emulating Venezuela to be eliminated, due to their lack of comparable natural-resource revenues. Chávez's attempts to forge an alternative to the US-backed Free Trade Area of the Americas, meanwhile, are in Reid's view doomed to failure.

Finally, the fourth main element of Reid's argument, running through his book as a persistent ideological thread, is that there is an intrinsic link between neoliberal reforms and democracy, and that the crucial factor in guaranteeing both is 'political stability'. Reid states at the outset, somewhat disingenuously, that his 'main argument' is that 'for the first time in Latin America, genuine and durable mass democracies have emerged across much of the region', withstanding various tests with what he subsequently terms a 'stubborn resilience'. Later he asserts that 'in the long run, democracy and successful market economies are mutually reinforcing'. The proposition is common enough in, say, the 1990s literature on globalization or post-Communist 'transitions' in Eastern Europe; in the case of Latin America, Reid makes a strong connection between the democratization that took place as of the late 70s—part of Samuel Huntington's 'Third Wave'—and the implementation by the newly elected governments of the 80s of the policies later codified by Williamson. In this analysis, neoliberal reforms were part of a grand liberal-democratic bargain, in which economic growth was assured by adherence to common-sense macroeconomics, and grateful electorates responded by

opting for centrist political stability—‘neither Che nor Pinochet’—over the maximal demands of left and right. It is this compact that Reid holds out as the best hope for continued growth, and which must be defended from any mass upheavals or radically redistributive projects.

How should Reid’s argument be assessed? Taking the four principal strands in order, it is clear, first of all, that his evaluation of the impact of the Washington Consensus is altogether too sunny. Notably absent from his balance sheet of the reforms is any mention of their impact on employment and real wages, both of which were severely hit by the shockwaves of neoliberal restructuring. Between 1990 and 2000, according to CEPAL data, official unemployment for Latin America as a whole almost doubled, from 5.8 per cent to 10.4 per cent. The record scarcely improved in the new century: the average for the region remained above 10 per cent until 2005. In Argentina it reached 19.7 per cent after the default crisis of 2001–02, and in Brazil rose to 12.3 per cent in 2003; Colombia’s jobless rate peaked at 19.4 per cent in 1999, and remained over 15 per cent until 2005. Moreover, none of these figures take account of the burgeoning informal sector—a land of ‘opportunity’ in Reid’s eyes, exempt from ‘Baroque labour laws’ and red tape—which by 2004 accounted for more than half of all employment in much of the region, according to the ILO, and as much as 60 per cent in Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and Paraguay. The IMF estimates that in Mexico, it now accounts for around a third of GDP—more than the official totals for industry and agriculture combined.

Across the continent, the expulsion of millions of people from minimally secure jobs and into a state of permanent precariousness has been a core element of the restructuring Reid applauds. It has also involved a forceful downward pressure on wages, reflected in the fact that the share in national income of the bottom decile stagnated or even declined across much of the region in the 1990s—CEPAL figures show that it dropped from an already minuscule 0.7 per cent to 0.6 per cent in Brazil, and remained stuck on 1 per cent in Peru and 1.4 per cent in Mexico. Again, there have been only fractional improvements since 2000: data from 2006–07 show the poorest decile with 0.8 per cent of income in Brazil and 1.5 per cent in Mexico; though there were real gains in Peru, where by 2003 the figure stood at 1.4 per cent. In Colombia, however, the picture is one of worsening deprivation across the same period: whereas in 1991 the bottom tenth took in 1.2 per cent of income, by 2005 their share had dropped by a third, to 0.8 per cent.

Reid adduces a series of Gini coefficients, gauging inequality in distribution of income, to prove that the disparities between rich and poor have been reduced in much of Latin America—though it is noticeable that his figures for the region as a whole stop in 1992. In any case, such numbers only measure the gap in incomes: the amount the poor actually receive

in real terms need not necessarily rise for this to be narrowed. There has, indeed, been a drop in the share of measured income at the top; but this has not been a consequence of social levelling, but rather of the increasing proportion of wealth in the richest decile accounted for by profits, rents and dividends—products of the financial opening of the continent that are not captured in standard income data. Much of the ‘foreign direct investment’ in Latin America since the 1980s has in fact been made by local elites with capital stationed overseas, completing ‘round-trips’ begun by previous episodes of capital flight—enormous sums that would have to be factored into any true picture of the region’s distribution of wealth.

In this context, the wave of privatizations carried out in the 1980s and 90s constituted a vastly regressive *de facto* tax on the poor—ensuring that the provision of basic services and infrastructure was no longer funded by state taxation, but rather by fees levied from end-users many of whose ability to pay had, as we have seen, been severely undermined. Hence the resistance to the Bechtel-led consortium in Cochabamba in 2000, where Reid grudgingly admits that ‘a few people found themselves paying a third of their income on water’, and ‘charges doubled for a small number of very poor consumers’. More fundamentally, there was no pressing economic rationale for privatization by the time it was implemented: as Carlos Medeiros has observed in these pages (see NLR 55), a large number of state-owned enterprises were profitable, and made positive net contributions to national balance sheets, many of which were in any case not in deficit. The impetus behind the privatizations was predominantly ideological—as indicated by the astonishing speed and scale of the process, which in relative terms outdid those of all other world regions barring post-Communist Eastern Europe.

What of Reid’s ‘consensual’ models, and their respective social programmes? First we must properly quantify these ‘targeted’ schemes and place them in context. The Chile Solidario programme is the most miserly: according to World Bank figures, spending on it amounts to 0.08 per cent of GDP, in a country with an official poverty rate of 14 per cent in 2006—over 2 million people. Pinochet’s heirs are, of course, treated far more generously, with annual military spending averaging 3.7 per cent of GDP since 2000. The state-subsidized pension system, meanwhile, accounts for 5 per cent of GDP—contributing far more to the lessening of social disparities. In Mexico, where the poor officially number just under 20 million, Oportunidades is similarly economical, costing a mere 0.37 per cent of GDP. This is dwarfed in significance by the remittances sent home by Mexicans working abroad, which totalled US\$25 billion in 2008, representing around 3 per cent of GDP, and which have surely made more of an impact on poverty than the tokenistic handouts of either PRI or PAN administrations. Brazil’s Bolsa

Família is comparable in scale to the Mexican scheme, at 0.37 per cent of GDP, and should be seen against the backdrop of Brasília's commitment to iron fiscal discipline: year on year the Lula government has delivered primary surpluses above and beyond IMF recommendations, achieved largely by cutting public spending in crucial areas. In his first term, according to Marcio Pochmann, head of the Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada, Lula effectively decreased health and education spending by 7.5 and 5.4 per cent respectively. At the same time, macroeconomic propriety demanded that debt interest payments be met. The public debt in Brazil is largely held by domestic bondholders, who are the beneficiaries of what is effectively a form of regressive taxation; in 2008, they received amounts equivalent to 10 per cent of GDP—in other words, around 20 times the sums allocated for anti-poverty programmes, and over twice the budget for health; this in a country where infant mortality stands at 31 per 1,000 live births, compared to 6 for Cuba, 15 for neighbouring Argentina and 23 for China.

In this light, the 'targeted' social schemes Reid advocates appear as little more than pious window-dressing, amid continual transfers of massive resources to bondholders and the export overseas of ramped-up profits from privatized utilities. They are the symbolic element of redistribution—'homeopathic', in Perry Anderson's phrase—designed to secure mass approval for the ongoing class project of neoliberalism. Their ideological character is made clear by Reid's approval for their 'individual' nature, and by his disparagement of old-fashioned notions of 'entitlement'. For such schemes seek to replace collective rights to a share of national income with atomized dependency on the state—and in the process have worked to entrench existing patterns of poverty. According to a 2007 UNRISD report, through their focus on women as guarantors of compliance with the schemes' requirements, they have also reinforced traditional patterns of gender inequality. Moreover, contrary to Reid's assertions, these programmes are often as clientelistic as the 'populist' practices he decries: under Fox, Oportunidades has been directed above all at rural constituencies more likely to vote for the PAN, while in Brazil, Bolsa Família recipients must register to vote in order to continue receiving payments; Chico de Oliveira has pointed to the unsurprising correlation between CCT disbursements and votes for Lula (see NLR 42).

But perhaps the most telling point against such 'anti-poverty' measures is made by Reid himself, in his discussion of inequality statistics. Here he cites the World Bank to the effect that 'before taking into account tax and state transfers, incomes in the UK and Sweden were not much more unequal than those of Latin America'—in other words, that critical elements in reducing inequalities of income are progressive taxation and a developed welfare system. Yet it is precisely the state's capacity to deliver either that has

been undermined by the Washington Consensus reforms. In the case of the former, as Reid records with no little satisfaction, corporate tax rates shrank from an average of 42 per cent in the mid-80s to 30 per cent by the mid-90s, while VAT rose from 10 to 15 per cent—a flagrantly regressive combination. Meanwhile, divestitures of SOEs have deprived states of revenue streams to fund welfare provision, while fiscal austerity has crippled public services. It is arguably first and foremost the removal of Latin American states from the commanding heights of their economies—the project underpinning the Washington Consensus—that has prevented any systematic reduction in poverty in the region.

Reid's case against the Venezuelan 'populist' alternative is the weakest element in his overall argument, since it does not even rest on selective deployment of facts, but rather on occlusion of the Chávez government's actual record (though here at least Reid, unlike many others, has enough integrity not to actively distort the figures). In the social sphere, this has been indisputably positive: poverty, which had reached an astronomical 65 per cent after the implementation of the IMF's 'Agenda Venezuela' in 1996, has been cut by almost half since Chávez took office, from 55 per cent to 31 per cent. According to Mark Weisbrot at the Center for Economic and Policy Research, government social spending has increased significantly, from 8.2 per cent of GDP in 1998 to 13.6 per cent in 2006, a figure which does not include programmes directly administered through PDVSA or the Fondo de Desarrollo Nacional, which total another 7.3 per cent of GDP. This considerable outlay has permitted a twelvefold increase in the number of primary care physicians, and a cut in the infant mortality rate from 21 per 1,000 in 1998 to 16 in 2005. Unemployment too has dropped in Chávez's decade in power, from 11 per cent to 7.8 per cent—a development facilitated by growth rates averaging 13.5 per cent since 2003.

The Bolivarian model does, however, present a number of problems that are not to be dismissed lightly. Foremost among them is the economy's overwhelming dependence on oil, accounting for 93 per cent of exports. The cycle of dependency is reinforced by the maintenance of a high exchange rate, which has strangled the development of other domestic sectors that would permit Venezuela to diversify its economy. The creation of social programmes operating in parallel to existing state structures has also meant a duplication of bureaucracies, bringing with it inevitable inefficiencies as well as opportunities for misuse of funds. Politically, as Steve Ellner has noted in his *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics* (2008), the *chavista* movement lacks internal mechanisms to promote discussion and debate, which would be critical to ensuring its continued democratic vitality. But Ellner also notes that *chavismo* cannot be simply equated, as Reid claims, with Latin American populists of the 20th century: its emphasis on state intervention and its

fostering of small-scale co-operatives together pose a more direct challenge to existing oligopolies than Perón would ever have considered mounting. In that sense, *chavismo* is not a mere historical regression to the *caudillos* of the 19th century or charismatic figures of the 20th, but rather represents a new and genuinely radical mass phenomenon.

What of the connection Reid makes between the Washington Consensus and democratization? The first government to implement neoliberal prescriptions in Latin America was, of course, the Pinochet dictatorship. Reid shifts somewhat uncomfortably in his seat to acknowledge this, but then applauds the 'negotiated' character of the transition to democracy in Chile. Even in Reid's description, however, it is clear that the process was essentially one of institutionalized threats: 'Pinochet stayed on as army commander for seven years, the civilian government was saddled with a military-dominated national security council, and former military commanders were among nine appointed senators who gave the conservative apparatus a veto over constitutional change.' The pensions of the military were also notably exempt from the privatizations enforced on the rest of the public sector and pension system.

The democratic nature of the 'reforms' as implemented elsewhere is also open to question. In Mexico, the main thrust of privatization was carried out by Salinas, installed in 1988 after a brazenly fraudulent election. The same year, Pérez was elected in Venezuela on a populist platform, but no sooner had he taken office than he reversed course to implement a neo-liberal programme; the same happened in Argentina in 1989 with Menem and in Peru the following year with Fujimori. In many of these cases, privatization was carried out by presidential decree, in order to circumvent opposition from elected lower houses—Fujimori even dissolved congress and suspended the constitution in his 'self-coup' of 1992. In Brazil, Cardoso rewrote the constitution so as to sell off state assets. Reid does concede that there have been 'crude assertions of presidential power', but sees them as 'the exception, not the rule'. On the contrary: presidential prerogatives were crucial to the implementation of the Washington Consensus, providing a means for breaking the 'deadlocks' of democratic deliberation in the name of market reform.

Finally, Reid entirely omits any discussion of the impact on Latin America's democracies of structural reforms which have served to increase the influence of financial markets and the multilateral bodies forwarding their interests. Whether in the shape of the IMF, ratings agencies, hedge funds or multinational corporations, a host of outside actors entirely immune from democratic accountability have a decisively increased say over the fate of hundreds of millions, with the power to hold recalcitrant governments to ransom or blackmail them onto the path of macroeconomic orthodoxy.

Latin America's vulnerability to sudden swings in market conditions has become painfully evident since the onset of the present financial crisis. Private capital inflows, for example, halved from 2007 to 2008, and are expected to sink further this year. CEPAL recently projected that the region as a whole will experience a contraction of 1.7 per cent of GDP, but this masks more severe downturns in economies that depend to a greater degree on overseas markets—most notably Mexico, where 80 per cent of exports go to the US alone, and where GDP is forecast to shrink by 7 per cent. Unemployment in Mexico has risen rapidly in the last year, with jobless rates significantly above the national average in northern states where *maquiladoras* play a larger role; in all, almost 600,000 jobs were lost in the six months to March 2009. In Brazil, confident pronouncements that the country had 'decoupled' from the advanced capitalist world have proved mistaken, as industrial output has shrivelled; in the last quarter of 2008, an estimated 800,000 jobs were lost. Argentina too is suffering from falling demand elsewhere, since exports account for around a quarter of GDP. The recent rally in the oil price means Venezuela may be less damaged than its Andean neighbours, but Central American countries, where remittances have a proportionally greater weight, are likely to be hit hard by the recession in the North.

Writing in 2007, Reid was optimistic that 'the next time the world economy is hit by financial instability, Latin America will not be the main protagonist'—failing to take into account the possibility of systemic instability striking down the capitalist heartland, with which the economic fortunes of the region are now ever more closely interlinked. But this is only one of the many damaging legacies of the neoliberal era in Latin America. A region historically marked by deep inequalities has witnessed their entrenchment in quantitative terms, and their amplification in the realm of social experience. The super-rich commuting in helicopters from fortified compounds to skyscrapers, while on the ground the poor scramble to earn a precarious living, and in their midst a thin layer seeks to emulate the consumption patterns of the US or European middle classes—such jarring juxtapositions are more than a mere continuation of 'under-development'. For the Washington Consensus has produced not only substantial shifts in the distribution of wealth and opportunity, but also profound changes in the structure of one economy after another, through processes of de-industrialization and tertiarization, along with an increased emphasis on export-led growth that has compressed domestic consumption, even as urbanization has filled cities with unmet needs.

In sum, the neoliberal decade has bequeathed Latin America a series of socio-economic dislocations that have progressively undermined its potential for autonomous development, and increased its vulnerability to outside shocks. Indeed, the 'reforms' Reid praises have contributed centrally

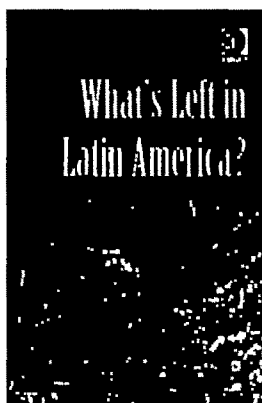
to instability and inequality in the region, and the 'stability' he recommends to preserve the current dispensation can only serve to store up further crises for years to come. Of course, we should not be surprised that this broader view of the systemic problems neoliberalism has created is missing from *Forgotten Continent*. But nor should we expect the same set of prescriptions to provide an exit from Latin America's subordinate position within the circuits of global capital.

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Robert Kagan, *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*
 Atlantic Books: London 2008, £12.99, hardback
 116 pp, 978 1 84354 811 9

MAX GASNER

THE RIVALS

It is rare for a magazine article to spawn an entire counter-genre of polemic pamphlet literature, but American policy intellectuals have not yet tired of announcing the end of *The End of History*. If anything, the pursuit has gained in popularity as the signs of a post-unipolar twenty-first century have become more insistent. Thus Robert Kagan, whose *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*—its cover festooned with a self-consciously anachronistic *Punch* cartoon, complete with Russian bear and pig-tailed Chinaman—argues that ‘the world has become normal again’. The fall of the Soviet Union had briefly held out the utopian vision of a world without enemies, in which all significant conflict over grand strategy and ideology had come to an end. Globalizing commerce, multilateral institution-building and seamless communications technology were to have eroded the foundations of the nation-state and so the stakes of international competition. European bureaucrats dreamed that Russian acquiescence to capital account liberalization and NATO expansion would melt the Eastern frontiers away and forever banish the spectre of land war in Germany. Americans saw a chance to assume a kinder, gentler leadership: the US as global sheriff, enforcing the definitive replacement of war by isolated police actions in backwards provinces.

Twenty years on, the ‘tantalizing glimpse’ of a world beyond conflict has vanished and the ‘normal tendency’ of great powers to emerge has reasserted itself. Driven by atavistic but legitimate passions—fear for their supply lines, paternalist or imperial concern for their hinterlands, desire for recognition or prestige—the rising powers, here Russia, China, Japan, India and Iran, are following in the footsteps of Venice and Persia, the ancient Egyptians and the Franks. They are making their presence felt in ways that

had grown unfamiliar even during the Cold War, a long, aberrant interlude of bipolarity in international affairs. We face instead a 'new nineteenth century' of great-power rivalry and conflict, in which autocracies again challenge the pre-eminence of democratic government, and competing claims to regional spheres of influence stand in the way of the construction of a single, liberal-interventionist international order. In the face of this only half-comprehended threat, Kagan calls for a 'Concert of Democracies': as only their combined efforts can preserve the hard-won fruit of history, which never comes to an end.

A signatory of the notorious 1998 Project for the New American Century letter that called on President Clinton to pursue a unilateral policy of regime change in Iraq, and best known for his 2003 *Paradise and Power*, a short and provocative essay on European and American self-perceptions, Kagan is no outsider to Washington policy circles. Born in 1958, his degrees are from Yale, the Kennedy School and American University in DC. After cutting his teeth as an advisor to Jack Kemp and a speechwriter for George Schultz, he worked in the second Reagan administration at the State Department's Latin American desk. Kagan is on the roster of the Council on Foreign Relations and the Carnegie Endowment, and writes regular columns for the *Washington Post*, *Commentary*, the *New Republic* and, with Bill Kristol, for the *Weekly Standard*. His wife was the US permanent representative to NATO from 2005–08, their sojourn in Brussels doubtless the source of the cosmopolitan touches with which Kagan occasionally tempers his brisk Atlanticism—'as an American living in Europe', etc. His father, Donald, is a conservative historian at Yale and translator of Thucydides; his brother, Frederick (Yale, and then Yale), is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and a co-author of its refutation of the Iraq Study Group's report.

But there are grounds for taking Kagan more seriously than many of his Beltway peers. Besides displaying a capacity for forthrightness in his columns and popular writing, he is the author of two scholarly works setting out a subtle and equivocal vision of foreign relations—one on US intervention in Nicaragua, the other on American foreign policy since the birth of the Republic. The first, 1996's *A Twilight Struggle*, is a scrupulously documented, 800-page history based on primary sources and interviews with key figures on all sides of the conflict. Of course Kagan does not repudiate his work for Reagan; but he is lucid and sobering about the unenviable consequences for both parties when US military interference becomes a routinized fact of domestic political life in a small country. And although he rejects the 'realist' interpretation of foreign policy decisions, he is candid about the ways in which the US's ideological aims in Latin America were always subject to the shifting tides of political capital and congressional advantage—not just under Reagan and Carter, but also Taft, Wilson and Roosevelt.

In *Paradise and Power*, written during the altercations over the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Kagan turned to tackle European and American self-perceptions. While Europe had embarked on the postmodern path towards 'a self-contained world of laws and rules and transnational negotiation and cooperation . . . a post-historical paradise of peace and relative prosperity', the US remained 'mired in history', and in a power politics increasingly repugnant to European sensibilities. But both were suffering from a mutual misunderstanding about the relation of democratic government to power. On the one hand, Europe flatters itself that its decision to abjure war is fully conscious and enlightened, rather than the result of its increasing inability to fight. On the other, Americans flatter themselves that they are a pacific people, and that the wars they fight are forced on them by circumstance. This double delusion falsifies Americans' and Europeans' shared ends—and sharply unequal means. For the strong naturally rely on strength to achieve their aims; the weak naturally pursue the strategies of weakness. If the EU were a military force on a world scale, capable of projecting power across two oceans, the compass of its external policy would necessarily expand; it too would become more assertive about the shape of the world in which it is embedded. Yet for Kagan, 'the caricatures do capture an essential truth': after centuries of brutality and violence, Europe has broken out into something like the Kantian realm of perpetual peace—with the Second World War figuring as Europe's war to end war, and Schuman and Monnet as the unlikely agents of the final state of Kant's essay on world history 'which, like a civil commonwealth, can maintain itself automatically'. It is the burden of *Paradise and Power* to raise the stakes of force in maintaining an international order that it is much more comfortable to consider as acting 'automatically': Europeans revile the sometimes messy protection afforded by their less lucky but more powerful ally only at the risk of their heretofore uniquely privileged way of life.

In 2006, Kagan produced the first instalment of a projected two-volume history of America's position in the world system. *Dangerous Nation*, which runs from 1600 up to the Spanish-American War of 1898, is as unflattering to the prejudices of mainstream American conservatism as its title suggests. It is an admirably frontal assault on many of the sacred cows of American historiography. Instead of denying or evading the harsh criticisms of the anti-imperialist, and occasionally socialist, tradition running from Charles Beard and William Appleman Williams through to Howard Zinn, Kagan rather proudly admits the charges. The Republic's imperial ambitions date to its very beginnings, and Americans deceive themselves when they claim to be a peaceable people who have, unfortunately, occasionally found the role of apostles of freedom to the world thrust upon them. He has no time for the hoary old conservative defences: for instance, the

timeless wisdom of Washington's famous farewell address, with its admonitions on 'our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world', is deftly resituated within the domestic political disputes of the time. No one reading those lines in 1796, Kagan argues, could have failed to understand that they were aimed against Republican Francophiles and intended to sway opinion towards the Federalists in the coming election. From this dismaying beginning he then dwells on such topics as Jefferson's private war on the Barbary Coast, the place of Polk's invasion of Mexico in the ambitions of Southern slaveholders and the American occupation of the Philippines. The Founding Fathers are portrayed as wealthy landowners driven as much by concern for their real-estate holdings as by their republican beliefs.

It is a thought-provoking exercise in demystification which aims to uncover the role of myth-making in enabling and conditioning the nation's reach and policy. The argument about democratic self-awareness, or the lack thereof, sketched in *Paradise and Power* is here put to a more stringent test. Expansionism, Kagan wants to say, is for a rising nation—the young United States as much as the newly independent and self-assertive China—an essentially avowable and legitimate aim; for America to deny its expansionist tendencies can only make it more difficult to understand the history and future of its presence in the world. And there is something especially expansionist about the American flavour of political liberalism: a society that sees itself as the 'city on a hill' will naturally pursue a foreign policy that is expressive of a certain vision of the world remade.

Kagan has no truck with the notion that American policy was 'hijacked' by a neo-con cabal after September 11. There is nothing either new or conservative about Americans making war for ideological reasons: the footnotes to *The Return of History* enumerate fifty years of bipartisan adventures in aerial bombardment, invasion and regime change. From Eisenhower's 'CIA-inspired coups in Iran and Guatemala' to Kennedy's 'conniving' against Ngo Dinh Diem in Vietnam and Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, from Nixon's 'meddling' in Chile to Carter's in Nicaragua—'every American administration in the last half century has attempted to engineer changes of regime throughout the world'. In the process, the US has flouted the United Nations, its allies and international law whenever these became obstacles to American objectives:

To pick just a few recent examples: the Reagan administration sought no international authorization for its covert wars in Nicaragua, Cambodia, Afghanistan and Angola, and it sought neither United Nations nor OAS support for the invasion of Grenada. The administration of the first President Bush invaded Panama without UN authorization and would have gone to war with Iraq without UN authorization if Russia had vetoed it. The Clinton

administration intervened in Haiti without UN authorization, bombed Iraq over the objection of United Nations Security Council permanent members, and went to war in Kosovo without UN authorization.

Nor does Kagan assign any special importance to the war on terror, rather dismissing Al-Qaeda and Islamic fundamentalism as phenomena with no future. The new nineteenth century, like the last, is a world of states, though Kagan's whirlwind tour of the rising powers is surprisingly fleshless. Japan is given cursory treatment, its increasing defence budgets and resurgent nationalistic impulses more evidence of a 'return to normalcy'. India, 'a prime example of success' in a globalizing world, is driven by belief in its 'impending greatness on the world stage'. Iran is 'a proud and ancient civilization' pursuing nuclear-weapons status as 'a question of honour', and to establish itself as a great power in the region.

It is Russia and China that engage Kagan's attention most fully. For Russia is 'where history has most dramatically returned'—having most dramatically ended there two decades ago. The country's vast reserves of oil, gas and coal give it strategic leverage over European governments, which has helped embolden the Kremlin to act in its 'near abroad' without fear of retaliation from the West even as high energy prices served to fund both its growing military and its reviving confidence. Russian discontent with second-rate status has driven the resurgence of interest in Stalin, the Orthodox Church and the old empire; the openings and liberalizations of the 1990s are now increasingly resented, seen as unwelcome concessions forced on the nation in a time of weakness. Putin's government, which Kagan calls 'czarist', has chosen to follow a model of 'sovereign democracy', and indeed has provided so well for its people that it has enjoyed the highest levels of popular support for any Russian government since the fall of the Soviet Union.

This dissatisfied former great power presents the European Union with the old 'Eastern problem' it thought had been dispelled by German reunification and Russian economic liberalization—and which erupted last August in South Ossetia. Kagan was thrilled, writing in the *Washington Post* that the Russian invasion of a sovereign, democratic nation on its borders marked 'a turning point no less significant' than the fall of the Berlin Wall; the diffidence of the European Union's response was taken as a sign that Europe is not ready to 'bring a knife to a knife fight' (were German jets supposed to scramble to defend Tbilisi?). But victory over the 10,000-strong Georgian army does not a military power make. Russia has the third-largest defence budget in the world in much the same sense that Iraq, on the eve of the US invasion, had the fifth-largest army. Even if it were properly maintained, Moscow's arsenal—not to mention its top-heavy command and control structure, ultimately more important—belongs to a previous age; among

Russia's military accomplishments in Georgia was its first proof-of-concept of the planned move to an all-volunteer army (and away from a system in which young conscripts are routinely beaten to death by their fellow soldiers). In any case, the war in Georgia—like that in Chechnya, and the more dramatic proclamations of Russian nationalism—was surely meant first for domestic consumption, a satisfying demonstration of national strength, rather than as groundwork for a multipolar future.

And though Kagan is not much for the economic interpretation of Russia's recent history, it is hard to see how else to understand its shifting fortunes on the world stage. The fall of the Soviet Union precipitated the biggest economic catastrophe of the twentieth century: Greater Russian nationalism could not pay salaries in the Yeltsin years; and were it not for that period—and the dramatic banking collapse of 1998—Putin's achievements would not appear so significant, either domestically or abroad. Kagan's book was published before the crash of September 2008, when a number of more or less unbiased eyes—not least estate agents in Mayfair—might well have assessed Russian power more favourably. But since then, the RTS and MICEX have crashed, energy prices have sunk below the break-even levels built into national budget planning, and European banks have demanded billions of dollars of collateral on their loans to the oligarchs. The Russian government has once again intervened to support the banking system, while capital has flown out of the rouble. Gazprom no longer looks like much of a force in German foreign policy. 'Comprehensive national power' cannot be built on the shaky foundations of oil wealth, kleptocracy and casino capitalism. There are fewer people in Russia than in Uttar Pradesh; the country's economic gains over the past decade were massively concentrated in the hands of a small, powerful stratum at the top, and seemed impressive above all compared to the catastrophic 1990s. With wages once again in arrears and Europe's most virulent xenophobia loose on the streets, it faces severe internal problems.

The case is harder to make for China, whose leaders have studiously avoided the appearance of belligerence during the country's precipitous economic rise. There are exceptions to the general tone of conciliation: Beijing can still take umbrage over Taiwan, despite recent signs of eased relations, and more so over Tibet, where it has a freer hand. But China's concessions look more significant in every respect. Despite US hostility to Chinese attempts to build stakes in American companies such as Unocal and 3Com, its sovereign investment funds have remained placid buyers of US Treasuries, agency bonds and bank debt through the unfolding economic crisis. Indeed, the PRC leadership has been hesitant to build any but passive leverage out of their massive trade surpluses, while hiring Western investment bankers as part of their bid to construct regulatory, financial and

legal structures meeting international standards and sufficient to the needs of foreign direct investment. The hands-off policy towards Hong Kong, the eagerness to cooperate as a full member of Washington Consensus institutions, even the Olympic pageant—choreographed by Zhang Yimou to the highest standards of global spectacle, with nary a hint that the East is or ever was Red—all tend to counter the notion of a Chinese leadership inclined to use force to pursue its ascendancy.

That ascendancy there will be there is no doubt; and Kagan is reduced to gestures at a kind of aesthetic of the sublime to show what is baleful about the prospect. The usual maunderings over the Middle Kingdom as the centre of its own universe, ‘the only advanced civilization in a world of barbarians’, make their appearance, though he does not in turn preface his analysis of Chinese attitudes towards America with the observation that, for Mandarin speakers, it is the Beautiful Kingdom. Kagan deploys the Qin Dynasty slogan *fuguo qiangbing*—‘wealthy nation, strong army’—to illustrate the longstanding, indeed imperial, roots of China’s military build-up. But as long as the latter is limited to buying more hardware from the Russians, we are probably justified in remaining sceptical about its consequences. Even if the Chinese government is engaged in what must be the largest build-out of secondary education ever attempted in human history, a military-industrial complex such as that which assures US military supremacy is the work of decades: a Lockheed or a Boeing cannot be summoned out of thin air in a country without even a civilian aerospace industry to speak of.

Some of Kagan’s specific observations are overblown. His assertion that the autocracies’ wealth allows them to ‘keep a grip on internet traffic’ ignores the richness of Chinese new media. Behind the Great Firewall lies what appears to be nothing so much as the birth of a public sphere—an unpredictable, active, diverse and critical world beyond the control of any human authorities yet devised. (When the censors’ algorithms proved too good at picking out objectionable strings of text—a harder task in a language so given to homophony and visual punning—enterprising forum users started posting texts that looked like gibberish to the robots but which were readable in columns, like the classical language, by the human eye.) Netizens can prove an unstable factor in the calculations of the bureaucracy even when they are being properly nationalistic, as evidenced by the anti-Carrefour movement and boycotts of French products that sprang up almost overnight in the spring of 2008. Beijing seems recently to have realized that news blackouts are doomed to fall before the power of the internet: Xinhua now aims to report contentious news as quickly as possible, in order to start spinning it before anyone else. Apparent openness, the Chinese authorities are beginning to understand, is often the surest technique of control—no news to Western societies of the spectacle.

Nor is China immune from economic shock. The degree to which its economy is dependent on exports remains an open question—and it is certain that in the long run Chinese capital can be repurposed to produce for domestic consumption. But in the short run, export-oriented industries directly employ tens of millions of workers in the coastal cities. Even a marginal shock to growth could have major consequences. Civil unrest—what the authorities call ‘mass incidents’—is on the rise, with every day bringing new scenes of workers besieging abandoned factories or CCP offices to claim wages owed them by enterprises forced into bankruptcy. Against this backdrop, it is easy to see why Beijing is forced by circumstances into pursuing a more sober and responsible course than Russia’s *siloviki*, and why tools for managing the surplus population—the household registration system, ‘black jails’ for unregularized migrant workers, semi-legal ‘urban management’ forces that systematically harass the marginal populations of big cities—are key to maintaining order in China.

These particularities are lost in Kagan’s account, which is a shame; for it is refreshing to see an American policy intellectual write with such approval of other countries’ national sentiments, and of their peoples’ legitimate desire for prestige and recognition. In this sense, *The Return of History* represents a welcome move to reinstate the connection between *Innen-* and *Außenpolitik*, dismissed by International Relations realist orthodoxy, as an explanatory crux of nations’ behaviour. Ultimately, however, Kagan seems only to be replacing a simplistic realism with an equally vacuous romanticism: the basis for a state’s self-assertion is seen as completely generic, ungrounded in economic contradictions or internal politics, unconditioned by social divisions. In his rendering, the foreign policies pursued by governments are expressive of the form of their domestic polities, which come in two kinds: democracies and autocracies. Kagan contends that the Chinese and Russian leaderships are the prime examples of the latter. They share an orientation to an alternative modality of rule, coherent enough to constitute a serious challenge to that of liberal-capitalist democracy. Their legitimacy rests on ‘the implementation of the popular will’, striking the tacit bargain that their citizens will refrain from political protest so long as the government is able to deliver prosperity and stability. In Kagan’s view, these are not merely pragmatic compromises: the leaders of Russia and China ‘are not just autocrats; they believe in autocracy’—in other words, that continued economic growth, protection from foreign domination and domestic tranquillity all require a strong hand on the tiller.

The notion of an authoritarian, ‘Confucian’ capitalism as a challenge to the Western model had been canvassed in the mid-1990s discussion on the ‘Asian values’ of Lee Kuan Yew and Mahathir Mohamad. In fact, with their firmly ensconced ruling castes, limited franchises and stern official

morality, the new Asian Tigers had not a little in common with Victorian Britain, as observers pointed out. In a wider historical compass, successful catch-up economies governed by placid parliamentarism have been the exception. Meiji Japan, the Prussian Zollverein or the Second Empire provide the general model, not Nehru's electoral technocracy. Kagan touches on the question of whether capitalism leads 'naturally' to democratic government, or whether indeed there is an active contradiction between the two, working to break up or hollow out any lasting settlement between them. But to fully grasp the issue would require him to acknowledge the tension between democratization—which in any substantive sense would aim at popular determination of macroeconomic and geo-strategic goals—and the 'diminished sovereignty' accepted by the limited partners to the Atlantic order of perpetual peace.

The circle is squared by Kagan's rather weak criteria for democratic government. The formal political freedoms of assembly and publicity represent real advances, of course, as does the possibility of the electoral rejection of sitting governments. But much in Kagan's description of 'autocracy' could be applied to any contemporary capitalist nation. Public pieties aside, on the level of governmental practice the substantive democracy envisioned by most Western policymakers amounts to little more than an opportunity for 'input' by the 'consumers' or end-users of government services and a soothing 'responsiveness' to any outbursts of public anger. Official Chinese ideology—Deng Xiaoping theory, the Three Represents, the Scientific Development Concept—effectively reproduces the tacit assumptions underlying the governments in a majority of advanced capitalist countries. Some of the most brutal strategies adopted by Kagan's autocracies—the Russian war on 'terrorism' in Chechnya, Chinese repression in Xinjiang—are modelled directly on the example of his democracies. As for the liberal side of things, recent events have banished any illusion that regimes supposedly committed to free markets would not resort to *dirigisme* at the first sign of economic danger.

Kagan is not in fact willing to claim that the ideological legitimacy of contemporary autocracies is on par with that of the nineteenth century's monarchies. As Fukuyama has pointed out, the evolutions of parliamentary and plebiscitary ritual retain enough prestige to be aped by many of the most repressive dictatorships on the planet. The true danger for the democracies lies not in the absolute appeal of the alternative but in their own delusions and internal divisions: Europe affecting to be above the bloody necessities that make the world of cellphones and EasyJet possible; America claiming that each war is forced upon it, to uphold the greater good and against its non-interventionist nature. Thus confused and disarrayed, Kagan argues, the democracies may find themselves ceding ground to Moscow

and Beijing, without ever entering into open conflict with them. This is the point at which Immanuel Kant and Zhang Yimou, the philosopher of liberal cosmopolitanism and the impresario of imperial fantasy, finally coincide: without a hegemonic guarantor, no peace. Kagan's warning of a 'new nineteenth century' suggests that the persistence of such a guarantee is at best unstable. The 'blessed miracle' of European integration and disarmament would then be a brief utopian interlude in the endless conflict of peoples. But if a twenty-first century Concert of Democracies could take the place of the nineteenth-century Congress of Vienna, a kind of benevolent *katechon* might be instituted under which the idea of civil order actually realized in the EU (and that has ultimately guided the main line of American policy thought since Wilson) would enable the West to ride out the shocks of the inevitable—and entirely necessary—ascend of the Asian powers to their rightful status in the world.

The establishment reaction to *The Return of History* has fastened onto the perceived contradiction between Kagan's realism about great-power rivalry and his commitment to a neo-idealist agenda of democracy-promotion. McCain's call for a League of Democracies and his proposal to exclude Russia from the G8 seemingly exemplified the danger of this approach, which risks antagonizing the excluded powers, who would be better coaxed into liberal ways through a gradual integration into the world market and the institutions of global governance. The objection simply elides the larger stakes of Kagan's study—the place of force in a peaceful world order, and the place of myth in the use of force—wagering, in essence, that consumer goods will do the trick.

Kagan's are the right questions, but asked for the wrong reasons. For his vision rests on a fatally ahistorical account of history: a nineteenth century without Peterloo or the Paris Commune. The liberal intelligentsia of the 1790s shared with that of the 1990s a profound faith in commerce as the gentle civilizer of nations. Kant may indeed have been too rigorous not to recognize the martial conditions of world trade; but what he could not see—and none of his contemporaries saw, even Adam Smith, caught up in comparisons between the 'opulence' of maritime Britain and imperial Rome—was capitalism. If today we face a new nineteenth century, it is because that epoch too was a period of unprecedented technological change, in which both the extent and the intensity of the capitalist market expanded geometrically; a period of social unrest driven by the destruction of traditional ways of life, the constitution of a massive new class of workers, its periodic immiseration and its recurrent demands for a reforging of the social settlement. 'Democracy' was indeed the bugbear of Europe's autocratic regimes—but it was substantive, not procedural. And it was not the absence of a sovereign power, but the inner contradictions of unemployment and

inequality that drove their conflicts. From this standpoint, Kagan's neglect of the details of Russian, Chinese and Indian social formations takes on a new significance: it means his account is doomed to miss the ways in which the modalities of government change to accommodate the demands of epochal shifts in economic organization, and the ways in which those changes in the form of the state rebound on the inter-state order.

Such deficiencies are all the more disappointing because, to judge by Kagan's previous work, we might have expected more. But he is of course far from alone in neglecting the specificities and deeper dynamics of the states he discusses. The general run of geo-strategic literature emanating from the US has a strangely disembodied quality, at once oversimplified and over-intellectualized. It is a genre that almost prides itself on its impunity, delighting in such phrases as 'boots on the ground' while remaining disconnected from operational realities, and seemingly little concerned with the domestic agenda of the country whose power it is busy projecting to the far corners of the world. It is the product of a stratum distinguished above all by its unaccountability: none of the professional flacks, functionaries and pocket intellectuals of the think-tank world will ever be denied a job because they helped start a devastating war; if anything, as with Kissinger and Brzezinski, the more catastrophic the outcome, the more *grise* the *éminence*. The threat this disjuncture between the formulation of policy and its upshot poses to the rational measurement of means to ends, and to the effective deployment of American power, should arguably be of just as much concern to the US elite as any 'association of autocrats'. But in this regard, Kagan's omissions are symptomatic of a broader blindness—not to the resurfacing of nineteenth-century great-power relations, but to the particularities of the present.

PETER GOWAN

15 January 1946–12 June 2009

GIOVANNI ARRIGHI

7 July 1937–18 June 2009

NLR will be writing about both.



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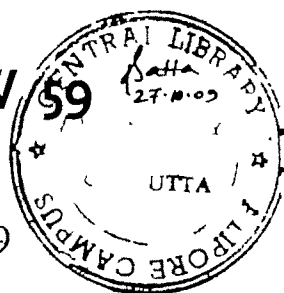
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Report from the lower depths of the global employment hierarchy, as the economic crisis multiplies the effects of informalization and agrarian decline on the billion-strong reserve army of labour.

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In an interview recorded earlier this year, Peter Gowan recalls his political and intellectual trajectory, from the end of empires to Marxist militancy, from Eastern Bloc shipyards to the rise of the Dollar-Wall Street Regime.

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GOPAL BALAKRISHNAN

SPECULATIONS ON THE STATIONARY STATE

A crisis occurs sometimes lasting for decades. This exceptional duration means that incurable structural contradictions have revealed themselves and that despite this the political forces which are struggling to conserve and defend the existing structure itself are making every effort to cure them within certain limits and to overcome them. These incessant and persistent efforts (since no social formation will concede that it has been superseded) form the terrain of the conjunctural, and it is upon this terrain that the opposition organizes.

Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*

WHAT IS THE historical significance of the implosion of neo-liberalism, coming less than twenty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union? A disconcerting thought experiment suggests itself. The USSR, it might be recalled, had reached the summit of its power in the 70s, shortly before stumbling downward into a spiral of retrenchment, drift and collapse. Could a comparable reversal of fortune now be in store for the superpower of the West, one of those old-fashioned 'ironies of history'? After all, a certain unity of opposites can be traced between an unbridled late capitalism and the centrally planned rust belts of the former Comecon—and precisely in the economic sphere, where they were diametrically counterposed. During the heyday of Reaganism, official Western opinion had rallied to the view that the bureaucratic administration of things was doomed to stagnation and decline because it lacked the *ratio* of market forces, coordinating transactions through the discipline of competition. Yet it was not too long after the final years of what was once called socialism that an increasingly debt- and

speculation-driven capitalism began to go down the path of accounting and allocating wealth in reckless disregard of any notionally objective measure of value. The balance sheets of the world's greatest banks are an imposing testimony to the breakdown of standards by which the wealth of nations was once judged.

In their own ways, both bureaucratic socialism and its vastly more affluent neo-liberal conqueror concealed their failures with increasingly arbitrary *tableaux économiques*. By the 80s the GDR's reported national income was revealed to be a statistical artifact that grossly inflated its cramped standards of living. But in the same decade, an emerging circuit of global imbalances was beginning to generate considerable problems for the measurement of capitalist wealth. The coming depression may reveal that the national economic statistics of the period of bubble economics were fictions, not wholly unlike those operative in the old Soviet system.

Of course, the recurring crises of capitalism are supposed to be different from the terminal stages of non-capitalist civilizations and modes of production. Such social orders seem to have lacked capitalism's distinctive capacity for creative destruction, for periodic renewal through downturns that liquidate inefficient conditions of production and life forms, opening up frontiers for the next round of expansion. In accordance with this pattern, nearly all commentators on today's economic meltdown have assumed that this Schumpeterian tale of crisis and renovation will repeat itself in one form or another. But is it, in fact, inevitable that new phases of accumulation will emerge from the aftermath of what now promises to be an enormous and protracted shake-out? I would like to propose that this scenario of capitalist renewal is distinctly less likely than a long-term drift towards what the classical political economists used to call 'the stationary state' of civilization.

Growthlessness

From Adam Smith to John Stuart Mill, early theorists of the wealth of nations were pessimistic about their societies' long-term prospects for growth, and assumed that the productivity gains from specialization and the division of labour would be thwarted after a certain point by the exhaustion of the soil and population increase. The historian E. A. Wrigley writes:

For reasons cogently argued by Smith and his successors, the momentum of growth was expected to peter out after a time, arrested by changes endogenous to the growth process itself, and giving rise in due course to the supervention of the stationary state. Moreover, the classical economists were unambiguous in doubting whether even the then prevailing level of real wages could be sustained indefinitely. Future falls were more probable than future rises. A steady and substantial improvement in real wages for the mass of the population was a utopian pipe-dream, not a possibility that a rational and well-informed man could plausibly entertain, however much he might wish to see it occur.¹

The passage suggests why Adam Smith and his contemporaries might have thought that a stagnant 18th-century China was in some sense ahead of contemporary Western Europe. Having exhausted the sources of further productivity growth, China had entered, inevitably, onto the path of secular involution: *de te fabula narratur*. Of course, this pessimistic verdict on civilization's *longue durée* was overturned by subsequent great waves of capitalist expansion. Marx's later critique of political economy was, in part, an attempt to reconceptualize this tradition's classical, pre-industrial pessimism regarding the external, natural limits to economic growth, transforming it into an account of an ever more difficult to surmount socio-economic impasse of accumulation.²

For more than half a century, such attempts to theorize the ultimate limits of capital were relegated to the political and intellectual margins. In

¹ Edward Anthony Wrigley, *Continuity, Chance and Change*, Cambridge 1990, p. 3. Pessimism was perhaps the wrong word for Mill, who wrote in 1848: 'I cannot, therefore, regard the stationary state of capital and wealth with the unaffected aversion so generally manifested towards it by political economists of the old school. I am inclined to believe that it would be, on the whole, a very considerable improvement on our present condition. I confess I am not charmed with the ideal of life held out by those who think that the normal state of human beings is that of struggling to get on; that the trampling, crushing, elbowing, and treading on each other's heels, which form the existing type of social life, are the most desirable lot of human kind, or anything but the disagreeable symptoms of one of the phases of industrial progress.' *Principles of Political Economy*, Part II, Chapter VI, § 2.

² Marx's speculations on a supposed tendency for the rate of profit to decline are notoriously unclear, but underlying them, perhaps, was the older Malthusian intuition: 'The more a country proceeds from large-scale industry as the background of its development, as in the case of the United States, the more rapid is this process of destruction. Capitalist production, therefore, only develops the techniques and degree of combination of the social process of production by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the worker.' *Capital* Vol. I, London 1976, p. 638.

the 1920s and 30s contemporaries of varying political persuasions had concluded that capitalism was coming to an end, and were surprised by its stupendous post-WWII recovery. This great come-back discouraged the more prudent from thereafter contemplating a capitalist crisis deep and long enough to put a question mark over the future of the system. Today, so soon after its late 20th-century triumphs, it might seem incredible that anyone would seriously call into question capitalism's historical viability. The matter was supposedly resolved circa 1989. Departing from this consensus, I propose that the coming era of socio-economic shake-out and contraction—the harvest of unresolved economic problems going back to the 1970s—is being compounded by a drift in the economically most advanced regions towards a stationary condition. The coming period will be shaped by the convergence of a conjunctural crisis of accumulation with ongoing epochal shifts in world capitalism—in its technological bases, demographic patterns and international division of labour—that have diminished its capacities for sustainable growth. In what follows, I will highlight some of the main dimensions of this dual crisis, and consider the forms of politics that may take shape within the contours of structural decline and transformation. What lies beyond the horizon of the current defensive nationalizations and bailouts of a faltering status quo?

Periodizing the present

Historians have long been preoccupied with the problem of decline and fall of communities, of the ways in which modes of life come to an end through structural change, extinction, or their involution into semblances of what they once were. Whoever considers the problem of qualitative historical changes today can draw upon various traditions of thinking about the moment, or whole period, during which some order of human things ceases to exist. There are punctuated collapses—the conquest of Pre-Columbian civilizations, the overthrow of the French Old Regime, the self-liquidation of the Soviet bloc—as well as those drawn-out transitions of which no contemporary was cognizant, like the decline of ancient slavery and the passages to feudalism. How then might the ends of capitalism unfold, over what time span, and along what dimensions?

The defining, expansionary drive of capitalism (M–C–M') depends upon a vast array of supporting and partly autonomous infrastructures

and dynamics. Seen in this light, the current predicament of capitalist civilization is not simply a matter of a cumulative logic of economic stagnation. I will argue that an emergent trend line of secular deceleration has been exacerbated—'overdetermined'—by mounting problems of demographic disproportion, ecological deterioration, politico-ideological de-legitimation and geo-political maladaptation. Nature, culture, war: the expansionary socio-economic drive that partially totalized these different historical dimensions into a world-system may now be faltering, leaving disparate elements and tendencies of the old regime to persist, with indefinite life-spans. Perhaps it would not take many generations for a non-dynamic capitalist order to evolve into an inequalitarian, drifting post-capitalism. In any event, it is safe to assume that the ends of capitalism will be as unprecedented as everything else about it has been.

If the collapse of the world market during the Great Depression initially appeared to confirm one or another 'orthodox' interpretation of Marx, in point of fact, no general theory of capitalist crisis has ever proven adequate to explain it. The causes of the depth and longevity of the Great Depression are still not well understood, at least for the US, which, unlike Germany, was far less dependent on an unbalanced inter-war world economy for its growth. Although all capitalist crises stem from anarchic, self-undermining processes of expansion, this self-undermining has failed to adhere to a general pattern, and assumes novel forms in every conjuncture. Exit from a global economic deadlock took one course after 1873—a gradual shake-out, without a precipitous collapse of output or living standards, eventually releasing the upturn of the 1890s; and another after 1929—a cathartic purge of the system by a severe depression, resolved only with the outbreak of war. Each major crisis of capitalism has unfolded in a new socio-historical world that modulated the ebbs and flows of valorization. As a result there are no generally applicable diagnoses and remedies.

While policy flounders, a number of broadly Marxist accounts of the economics of the period have come into their own. The works of Giovanni Arrighi, Robert Brenner and David Harvey are but the peaks of a wider literature on the current age of capital and the state. Compared to previous episodes of capitalist crisis, the long lead-up to today's downturn has been more profoundly theorized. In the 1930s and 1970s, even those who did not believe that capitalism had overcome its propensity to slumps and crashes failed adequately to explain the causes of a sudden,

worldwide systemic distress. What accounts for the difference? Perhaps neo-liberalism swept away many of the regulatory institutions and non-capitalist social formations that had previously impeded and modulated the logic of capital. Perhaps the unprecedented global economic imbalances that led to the current crisis were always harder to ignore, even as markets soared to new heights. For whatever reason, in the age of its universal triumphs, various limits of capital have come into view. And yet despite this cognizance of growing risk, even the harshest critics of neo-liberalism generally assumed that this volatility expressed the dynamism and rude health of the system.

The long 1970s

The last three decades of neo-liberal capitalism can be characterized as a prolonged, unsuccessful attempt to transcend the world economic crisis of the 1970s. Robert Brenner argues that the basic source of today's crisis is the diminished vitality of the advanced economies over the entire subsequent period.³ This deceleration is the result of a long-term decline in the rate of return on capital investment. Despite a subsequent reduction in the share of income going to wages and benefits in all the leading economies, Brenner shows that the rate of profit failed to recover after the 70s due to a persistent over-capacity in global manufacturing industries in excess of what would yield the previous return. A faltering rate of profit, occasionally reversed by spasmodic upswings, yielded smaller surpluses for reinvestment, leading to a slow-down in the growth of plant and equipment. In the leading advanced capitalist countries, this led to either wage stagnation or higher unemployment. Attempting to restore profitability, employers the world over held down wage and benefit levels, while governments reduced the growth of social expenditures. But the consequence of these cutbacks has been a protracted sluggishness in the growth of demand, reinforcing the stagnation stemming from overproduction. The cumulative problem of deceleration unequivocally manifested itself in a steady, system-wide expansion of government, firm and household debt. Although many have protested that this picture of the economic performance of the advanced capitalist world since the 70s is far too bleak, this across-the-board growth of debt should be taken as *prima facie* evidence that there was, in fact, a slow-down. For there is no other explanation for why it happened.

³ Robert Brenner, *The Boom and the Bubble*, London and New York 2002.

But in what sense has there been a worldwide growth of debt during this period? After all, at any given moment, investment—including purchases of interest-bearing debt—is supposed to be in equilibrium with savings. The problem has been that an increasingly large part of this world pool of savings has come to support a runaway growth of consumer debt and unsustainable speculation, in lieu of finding an outlet in the forms of investment that would generate sustainable income growth. Other countries' exports generate reserves that purchase US debt at rates low enough to sustain its bonanzas. The true economic history of the period is not a morality play in which virtuous producers and savers were pitted against gamblers and big spenders. The manufacturing sectors of the world's leading export economies—China, Japan and Germany—were just as dependent on the build-up of debt and speculation as the finance and real estate of the debtor countries. The reason is that as income from investment in plant and equipment sank, the level of aggregate demand became increasingly dependent on turning savings into interest-bearing debt, which under the right conditions can grow out of all proportion to the streams of income that ultimately support it. Debt is the taproot of the myriad forms of ultimately unsupported claims on wealth. 'As with the stroke of an enchanter's wand, it endows unproductive money with the power of creation and thus turns it into capital, without forcing it to expose itself to the troubles and risks inseparable from its employment in industry or even in usury.'⁴

Eventually, of course, it is exposed to all the troubles and risks of its employment. In Brenner's account the current crisis is the inexorable resurfacing of the pressure for a systemic shake-out that was never allowed to happen over the course of the last three decades, despite multiple rounds of downsizing and massive departures of capital from overcrowded manufacturing lines to cheaper locales and financial assets. The implosion of the American-centred financial and real-estate bubble is the end of the line for a whole period of gravity-defying account imbalances, asset bubbles and debt creation. Of course, the neo-liberal era has witnessed enormous bail-outs before: from the early 80s, such clean-up operations have been an essential enabling condition of getting the boom and bubble dynamic rolling again. But unlike previous local episodes of neo-liberal meltdown, this one is obviously taking place on a vastly larger scale, and no bailout can realistically keep the world

⁴ *Capital* Vol. 1, p. 919.

economy from entering into either a new era of world depression or a protracted period of slow-growth stabilization, or perhaps some novel combination of the two.

Elasticity of capital

So far there has been no general fall in price levels, apart from housing markets, of the kind that marked the 1870s or the 1930s. This testifies to the formidable capacities of the post-war state to support demand, although this may soon hit its limits as the toll of unemployment continues to rise everywhere. The current form of stabilization and the market rallies it makes possible come at the cost of growing indebtedness, which cannot continue indefinitely. This does not mean that the bottom will eventually fall out of prices, as it did during the Great Depression. In fact, the deflationary consequences of a large-scale drop in consumption—the upshot of firms and households attempting to pay down their debts—will likely be intertwined with, and occasionally counteracted by, inflationary or even hyper-inflationary bubbles that will result from attempts to stimulate flagging economies with injections of ever more liquidity, that is, by the printing of money. Over the next several years, we are likely to witness the birth of a new and bewildering form of stagflation.

Instead of propping up aggregate demand through debt, one might ask whether it would have been possible after the 1970s to unleash a crisis on a scale sufficient to liquidate the vast quantities of marginal and inefficient capital holding down the rate of return, thereby restoring the necessary conditions for a more dynamic capital accumulation. The Carter–Volcker shock was a brief experiment in that direction. Of course, if the US had stuck to that strategy, Latin American scale structural adjustments might have been the order of the day throughout much of the OECD. Perhaps if these societies had been able to withstand a shake-out on this scale, rates of growth might eventually have returned to a level that could have sustained a less debt- and speculation-dependent, albeit more modest, rate of growth. But would this scenario have materialized? Austerity in this period has only led to growth through a realignment of the economy to exporting. If the US had stayed the Volcker course in the 80s, it may very well have plunged the whole world economy (and not just Latin America) into a depression, and then would have found no one to export to. In any event, few

societies in the post-war affluent capitalist mould would have endured such a drastic restructuring and disentanglement, without the clear prospect of a return to rising levels of consumption.

High rates of growth sustained the social contract of post-war capitalism in the West. Even after its Golden Age, a buoyant consumerism remained as an unnegotiable legacy. Not only was a cathartic blast of thoroughgoing creative destruction out of the question after the beginning of the downturn in the 70s; the lower growth rates of consumption characteristic of earlier eras of capitalism were no longer socio-politically legitimate. Growing levels of debt were needed to make up for the potential fall-off in consumption. This happened despite the mass entry of women into the workforce, making double-income households the norm. The build-up of debt in this period, ultimately made possible by fiat money, expressed institutionalized expectations of rising affluence. While it is true that the growth rates of the last thirty years have not been low compared to more remote historic averages, they have been low in comparison to these historically shaped expectations which, as Marx said of the wage level, set the standard of what is high and low.

There are still intact socio-political barriers to the downward adjustment of living standards in the advanced capitalist countries, and probably in some of the more successful recently developing ones too. Neo-liberalism brought large-scale unemployment to Europe, long-term wage stagnation to America and increasing job and benefit insecurity everywhere. But except for the bottom fifth of the population, much of the social damage was cushioned by social provision, the increase of women's earnings (allowing for growth in overall household income) and, in some countries, burgeoning credit-card debt and house-price inflation. Across the OECD, public provision actually rose throughout the neo-liberal period as a percentage of GDP, largely due to the steadily rising health-care costs of these ageing societies. As a particularly striking example of this trend, Medicare shot up during the administration of G. W. Bush. But in the absence of the cushion of debt and speculation, standards of living could begin to deteriorate in ways more reminiscent of the 30s than the 80s. Of course, several countries experienced Depression-like collapses in the 80s and early 90s, or in the run of crises from 1997 to 2001; but outside of Africa these had the cold comforts of export-based growth to fall back on, after they were racked by structural adjustment. There are no comparable 'higher

powers' to impose structural adjustment on the largest advanced capitalist societies, but there is also now no immediate austerity/export path of adjustment. All the current Herculean efforts of bailing out and stimulation demonstrate that the leaders of the advanced capitalist world already know that what was supposedly good for the Third World goose is out of the question for the First World gander.

Technological revolution

No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have been developed.

Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*

The contemporary crisis exhibits a number of unfamiliar characteristics stemming from the inability of advanced capitalist societies to bear the costs of a new socio-technical infrastructure, to supersede the existing fixed-capital grid. The latter currently entrenches a 60-year-old complex of productive forces at the core of the world economy. The structural impasse that this has created has not been fully grasped, leading to difficulties in historicizing the last quarter-century of capitalism. Fredric Jameson's conception of postmodernism as the cultural logic of the period is arguably the great benchmark of contemporary epochalism.⁵ In the early 80s, Jameson originally conceived of this new order of things as a prefiguration of groundbreaking new technologies and energy sources of capitalism. In order to understand the subsequent trajectory of capitalist society, it is important to recognize that this great leap forward, what Ernest Mandel called the Third Technological Revolution, never really materialized. Even a more modestly conceived 'post-Fordism' failed to release a productivity revolution that would reduce costs and free up income for an all-round expansion.

Instead, the latest phase of capitalism got an ersatz form of growth primarily through credit-card consumerism and asset bubbles. Jameson's explanation for contemporary society's inability to experience and represent the totality of the world system initially attributed it to some immeasurable disproportion between human agency and newly

⁵ David Harvey's alternative theorization of postmodern capitalism is more directly focused on the problem of the rise and fall of socio-spatial infrastructures. See Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Cambridge 1990.

unleashed nuclear and cybernetic productive forces.⁶ But in later accounts, the locus of the problem silently shifted to mapping an opaque, pseudo-dynamic world of financial markets. Initial anticipations of an exhilarating new cultural condition gave way to totalizations of a more closed and derivative situation. Capitalism's culture became an organized semblance of world-historic dynamism concealing and counteracting a secular deceleration in 'the real economy'.

But what about information technology and containerization—the two signature technological breakthroughs of the period? These have undoubtedly powered a huge increase in world trade, over and above the growth of the world economy itself. Computerization and 'just in time' modes of organizing supply chains made it easier than ever before to bring manufactured goods to the world market, and relocate production. These cost-reducing technological and organizational changes countered the potentially inflationary consequences of the growing supply of various forms of money. Alongside American deficits, these trade-promoting changes were responsible for accelerating East Asian and especially Chinese growth. But unlike a 'nuclear-cybernetic industrial revolution', or the shift to some alternative energy source, technological change in this form has, by and large, brought vast quantities of goods from countries with lower labour costs into world markets already weighed down by overproduction of their higher-cost equivalents, instead of fuelling growth through the creation of whole new lines of production.

In the 90s it seemed plausible that containerization, post-Fordist production and supply chains and information technology in the new office place were the driving forces of a transition to a New Economy, one more productive, and in different ways, than anything that had come before it. But this great transformation somehow failed to show up statistically and, in due course, the stock-market crash of 2001 brought an end to the decade of cyber-hype. Altogether less plausible was the subsequent expectation that technologically retrograde real-estate bubbles, providing markets for exporters of consumer durables and raw materials, could be a sustainable basis for economic growth. Rather than leading to any 'New Economy' in the productive base, the innovations of this period of capitalism have powered transformations in the *Lebenswelt* of diversion

⁶ Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory*, London and New York 2008, p. 496; 'Post-modernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', *NLR* 1/146, July–Aug 1984.

and sociability, an expansion of discount and luxury shopping, but above all a heroic age of what was until recently called 'financial technology'. Internet and mobile phones, Walmart and Prada, Black-Scholes and subprime—such are the technological landmarks of the period.

Looking east

Alongside this myth of a technological new age, the other grand narrative of capitalism in this period has been the de-centring of the Euro-American core of capitalist civilization by the rise of Asia, by which was meant first Japan, and then China. Postmodern globalization has been an epic of the self-transcendence of the West towards an Oriental horizon. (Both geographically and world historically it makes sense that, in such accounts of the future of capitalism, Asia should appear as the new West, an America for the next millennium.) For more than half a century US hegemony had helped make this development possible, by opening up its vast market to selected clients and providing them with free military protection from Communism. In its late, post-Cold War phase, US demand galvanized the rapid growth of Asia's export powerhouses, which produced already existing manufactured goods but more cheaply. Instead of unleashing new productive forces more broadly or intensively, the latter's accumulated surpluses eventually came to fuel the inflation of asset bubbles around the world.

The process of this relocation of technologically less-advanced industrial production to low-wage regions has unfolded differently to that of the classically expansionary phases of the capitalist system. Although China has grown very rapidly along these lines, the world economy as a whole has grown too slowly and disproportionately for even this to be sustainable. While the US, and the West more generally, will come to accept a larger role for China in some emerging, unsteady crisis-management regime, this is not the beginning of a new, China-centred phase of accumulation. For the latter to be conceivable, Chinese growth would have to come to depend on new and more advanced productive forces—not simply the broader dissemination of existing ones that are not even at the most advanced level, like the US techniques that spread to Europe and Japan after the war. The quarter-century story of countries with a half or a fifth of US per capita GDP catching up and indeed surpassing it, cannot be repeated today by others that have scarcely a fourteenth.

Lower-tech manufacturing could conceivably keep China growing at an impressive rate but it cannot be the basis for a new global phase of accumulation. Moreover, China's rate of growth will soon be checked as export markets dry up. It is not clear whether China can now shift to domestically driven accumulation without a significant slow-down in growth. Only after a long, socio-politically transformative process of building up a compensatory domestic demand will some of the bases of sustained growth be secured for its population of a billion and a quarter. The PRC's current infrastructural investment stimulus is unlikely to counteract the massive shake-out of its export sector, because it is probably too small and too capital-intensive to begin shifting the economy towards domestic demand.

If the world was moving towards a new phase of vigorous, capitalist accumulation, China would be one of its main epicentres. But are there any reasons for thinking that, as the downturn simultaneously intensifies in Japan, the US and much of Europe, China will not only be able to avoid being dragged down with them, but will be able to grow so fast as to open up opportunities for their export-based recovery? Even by the largest estimates of its size, and even assuming that its increasingly export-dependent high rate of growth will not now decline precipitously, China's economy is too small to carry the weight. The West will continue to decline without giving rise to an ascendancy of the Far East, let alone of Brazil, Russia or India.

These conjectures are attempts to situate where we are in the *longue durée* of capitalism—somewhere in mid-stream or, alternatively, closer to an end; whether this mode of production is old or new, reaching its outer limits or poised for further waves of expansion. The dramatic geo-economic expansion of the system over the last two decades, the ongoing formal subsumption of the last great peasant populations of Asia, as well as the incorporation of the ex-Comecon industrial world, seemed to demonstrate the long-term growth prospects, inner and outer vistas of colonization, of an Empire *in statu nascendi*. But secular stagnation and chronically sputtering economies in much of Latin America, Africa and the former Soviet Union stand as sobering testimony to the failures of neo-liberal 'primitive accumulation' when compared to the classic enclosures that fuelled capital's genesis and episodes of expansion. Mike Davis's *Planet of Slums* is a disturbing exposé of the expulsion

of an ever-growing mass of obsolete humanity from the world market, as either producers or consumers.⁷

Parallel processes of obsolescence have unfolded in the advanced capitalist sector. Despite periodic bursts of frenzied speculation from the mid-1980s, accompanied by fanfare announcing the advent of an era of unprecedented capitalist dynamism, the results have only been brief, unsustainable bouts of new technological investment. Marx seems to have anticipated that capitalism would begin to slow down in the mature lines of its old homelands, as the explosive productivity growth of machines making ever more productive machines resulted in the employment of ever fewer workers. Over the long term, the further growth of industrial productivity would be thwarted by its tendency to reduce employment in this sector, and thus also to reduce the aggregate demand that would purchase the expansion of output. This was the form in which a contradiction between the forces and relations of production would unfold.

Grey society

Whatever the merits of this account, it is questionable whether the story of sustainable productivity growth through industrial revolutions will continue in the era of the service sector. Marx implied that the 'internal' cost of capital borne by firms would go up, bringing down the profit rate. What is being suggested here is that certain external social costs rise over the long term that cannot be counteracted by productivity gains elsewhere in the economy. Advanced capitalism would get a new lease on life if it found a way to decrease significantly the costs of health, education and age care without drastically reducing the level and quality of provision. But the productivity revolutions that reduced the agricultural population to single digits, and are now doing the same to industrial workforces—of course, counteracted by outsourcing to cheaper labour zones—are unlikely to be repeated for large parts of what is called the service economy. This is the main reason why capitalist economies eventually head towards the stationary state.

The reason why manufacturing is 'technologically progressive' has to do with its intrinsic attributes—production in this sector can be readily standardized, and consequently, the information required for production can be formalized in a set of instructions which can then be easily replicated. In

⁷ Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, London and New York 2006.

the case of services, there are large differences between various activities in their amenability to productivity growth. Some services which are impersonal, as in telecommunications, have attributes similar to manufacturing and hence, can be 'technologically progressive'. However, personal services, such as certain types of medical care, cannot be easily standardized and subject to the same mass production methods used in manufacturing. These types of services, therefore, will be 'technologically stagnant'. In general, if there are two activities, one of which is 'technologically progressive', and the other 'technologically stagnant', then in the long term the average rate of growth will be determined by the activity in which productivity growth is slowest.⁸

It is not clear how 'post-industrial' capitalism will be able to reduce the costs of social reproduction, given the long-term problems of technological stagnation in services like health care. This economic transition overlaps in turn with a demographic one, in which ageing populations come to be supported by diminishing numbers of productive workers: by 2050, 22 per cent of the world's population will be over 60; for Asia, the figure will be 24 per cent. The core of the post-1970s conjunctural crisis is an unresolved problem of overproduction and declining returns, leading to a slow-down of growth both relieved and exacerbated by the compensatory build-up of debt. The inherently slow growth of service-sector productivity further exacerbates the problem of demand, reinforcing other tendencies in this direction. The conjunctural crisis of neo-liberalism has become intertwined with an epochal-structural one brought on by a transition to a slow-growth, post-industrial service sector economy—the ageing, grey capitalism that Robin Blackburn has analysed.⁹

Blackburn's studies explore the ways in which pension-fund expansion has generated the potentials for a socialization of the financial sphere, even as this development remains trapped and thwarted by short-term, speculative logics. Intrinsic to this is the insight that modern economies have come to rely upon ever-greater state support of the infrastructural environments that sustain the value form. Both the viability of capitalism and the form of whatever lies beyond its horizon depend upon whether a politics emerges that will move this process of the socialization of infrastructure building and maintenance onto a rational and planned track, as opposed to it unfolding as an ever larger public

⁸ Robert Rowthorn and Ramana Ramaswamy, 'Deindustrialization: Causes and Implications', IMF Working Paper 97/42, April 1997.

⁹ Robin Blackburn, *Banking on Death*, London and New York 2003; and *Age Shock*, London and New York 2007.

subsidy to the flagging powers of private capital. It is hard to imagine a socially acceptable, cost-effective solution to many of these 'bio-political' problems within the framework of capitalism. Its historical vitality and expansiveness has depended upon a demographic youthfulness that is unsustainable over the long term.

After neo-liberalism

What are the prospects today for reforming capitalism in the aftermath of neo-liberalism? Some change is inevitable, as the ruling ideas of the period have suddenly gone bankrupt, even as they, like the great banks they promoted, get propped up for a while, or gently whisked off stage. But in this dilapidated state, neo-liberalism's former pretensions to intellectual superiority and realism will no longer be sufferable. One of its more scrupulous apostles recently made the following announcement: 'Another ideological god has failed. The assumptions that ruled policy and politics over three decades suddenly look as outdated as revolutionary socialism.'¹⁰ But popular subscription to these policies has arguably always been shallow, depending upon the perception that there was no alternative way for an economy to move forward. Although the reflexes of most political systems make a clean break with the status quo inconceivable, one would expect these governments to react pragmatically as economies start contracting, by ditching further experiments in deregulation and privatization, while trying to prop up market values through vast public interventions, in the few instances where such options are available.

It might be thought that the discrediting of neo-liberalism would send us back to an earlier Keynesianism, but this is unlikely to happen. Neo-liberalism was not just a 'reverse course' departure from the thirty years of post-war managed capitalism, but also a continuation of it by other means. This implies that what might be coming to an end is the whole post-1945 period of capitalism, in which governments claimed the capacity to smooth out business cycles and recessions through demand creation. If the last thirty years of neo-liberalism have witnessed a massive expansion of overall levels of private and public debt, compensating for persistent slow growth in the real economy, can governments realistically stimulate economies now by taking on more debt through public expenditure? The Keynesianism of the 30s was a remedy for economies

¹⁰ Martin Wolf, 'Seeds of its own destruction', *Financial Times*, 8 March 2009.

that had already bottomed out, not a means for preventing debt-laden economies from deleveraging. More American debt just prolongs the cumulative problem of massive global misallocation and imbalances, even if the alternative of letting the problem unravel in a chaotic free-for-all would make things considerably worse.

The hope that the present crisis might facilitate a transition to green capitalism may be equally unfounded. While stagnation itself could possibly slow down an ongoing, headlong deterioration of natural environments, a shift to alternative energy and green technology would almost certainly be undermined by the reduction in the price of fossil fuels that would result from a protracted slump. Overcoming these disincentives, the public commitments of leading states could of course be shifted to alternative fuels or green technology by a politics rationally oriented towards the long term. But at present it seems unlikely that such a politics could also be harnessed to a narrow project of capitalist restoration. The scale of public support for sufficiently remedial measures would overstep these bounds, and therefore be resisted very strenuously, unless precipitous deterioration exposed socially relevant populations to emergency conditions. However determined these efforts in conservation and sustainability eventually become, the ecological impasse of capitalism is likely to be the most absolute of all.

These problems are always perceived and treated by whole peoples as field problems, i.e. they are regarded as being soluble (and amenable to analysis) only in the capitalist field . . . At the helm is this or that class, this or that regime, this or that solution is being pressed, this or that particular direction has been taken etc, and until the real and imaginary possibilities of the field have been framed, tried, exhausted and discredited, no other field arises. Though the field itself may not satisfy reason (imagination may locate other fields, experience suggests yet others), in the currently functioning field of practice there is still enough reason operating for the purposes of the entire people and for the purposes of justifying what is happening.

Bertolt Brecht, *Journals 1934–1955*, entry for 14 June 1940

With its enormous bailouts, the Obama Administration has sought to salvage whatever might be saved from the neo-liberal status quo, including, of course, American seigniorage. This effort, even if it moves beyond the passivity of existing measures, will likely fail on its own terms.

The level of expenditure and state indebtedness required to stimulate unsustainable stock-market rallies and ward off deflation will eventually compel foreign holders of dollar reserves to abandon further purchases of dollar-denominated debt, thus driving up its cost. Until now, East Asian governments have been happy to fund US external and government deficits, in order to sustain US consumption and their own exports. But with the crisis overtaking even China, these governments may lose the capacity to finance US deficits, especially as they grow to unprecedented size, yielding diminishing returns.

For the time being, the world's leading export economies continue to accumulate dollar reserves, for fear that if they were to stop, a stampede to dump dollars might begin, resulting in a punishing devaluation of their reserves. Besides, in the absence of any other suitably big and liquid store of value, US Treasuries have preserved a now improbable aura of safety. But the tipping point is perhaps not so far away; a run on the dollar might break out despite the best efforts to prevent it; or, pre-emptively, the US could attempt to liquidate its debt load to foreigners with money printed on a scale that would unleash an explosive bout of hyperinflation, undermining the foundations of the world market for a long time to come. This impossible either/or situation has led to an impasse: debt levels cannot be brought down through vast devaluations because the worldwide socio-political fallout would be overwhelming; but propping up existing levels with more debt is economically unsustainable, even under the best-case scenarios of coordination. In their timidity, present efforts to shore up a tottering status quo with vast stimulus packages may wind up sharing the fate of efforts by early Depression-era governments to do the same through austerity measures. The 'solution' to the conjunctural problem of financial implosion might be a prolonged, difficult-to-sustain holding pattern, converging with an epochal shift to a stationary state. The former process may already have started; the latter could be the work of a generation.

Political forms

Which OECD societies could withstand prolonged bouts of structural adjustment of the kind that immiserated populations from Lagos to Vladivostok—especially now, when there are no longer export outlets to counteract the implosion of the home market? It is difficult to see what measures could be taken by political establishments to ensure that

depression-stricken societies stick to the course during this long march. It is probably safe to assume that elected parliaments, sheikdoms and oligarchies will all cleave to the dilapidated hull of American statecraft for as long as they can, after a prolonged period in which such rulers have stopped contemplating the alternatives. But the de-linking that will now unfold in the form of collapsing exports or withdrawn credit in any number of these countries might escalate to a different stage if power were to slip from their hands.

What politico-ideological forms will resistance to restructuring take, when the latter can no longer be implemented in accordance with the dictates of money markets, and now has to be imposed through more directly political—and therefore more controversial—processes of determining winners and losers? The erosion of older traditions of collective response makes prediction hazardous. The initially localized opposition to these processes will be 'class-like' to radically varying degrees, conditioning the shape of the social structures that will emerge out of the contemporary retrenchment of capitalism. The outcome of these struggles may depend upon the degree to which state powers can fortify the essentials of property and privilege as they could in an older age of class conflict. In many parts of the world, the coercive core of the state apparatus has undergone a long-term process of neutralization. Elsewhere, this is a more recent and reversible development. In the coming period, how will different political systems respond to creeping and direct threats to the rule of capital and its core constituencies, when the emergency resort to force may no longer be available to any decisive effect? During the 30s most of Europe outside of Scandinavia lurched to the Right, with brief Popular Front interludes in Spain and France. The US, and much of Latin America went Left. It might be interesting to try to anticipate similar variations today across all the zones of the world-system.

With a few worthy exceptions, there are currently no large-scale left-wing parties and movements implementing or even demanding radical reforms. But despite their abundant reserves of inertia and passivity, advanced capitalist societies are probably incapable of enduring the scale of hardship that a true depression would inflict on them, in the way that these same societies managed to get by in the 30s, and other poorer ones have done in our period. If there are no immediate left-wing Keynesian solutions, and society cannot be allowed to take the plunge into a full-scale shake-out, are there then any viable right-wing 'statist', i.e.

non-market-based, solutions to the current contradictions of capitalism? Comparisons to the 1930s inevitably raise the question of whether it is possible for advanced capitalist societies to move in the direction of a politics analogous to fascism. There is little chance that the electoralism that swept the earth after 89 will be menaced from this direction, although various weak states of emergency will no doubt abound. It is unlikely that older, right-wing forms of authority and discipline could be imposed on a demos of service workers and consumers, inured to more indirect forms of power, but allergic to traditional authority.

Since the conclusion of the Second World War and the advent of the atomic age, there have been no head-to-head confrontations between the world's most powerful states. This long peace in the Eurasian core has led to lower levels of manpower mobilization, promoting a less authoritarian but thoroughly depoliticized cultural atmosphere. The consequences of this pacification for relations between the sexes have been momentous, forming a powerful progressive trend from an earlier era that continues through this one. Fourier claimed that the level of emancipation in any society could be measured by the position of women within it, a metric that qualifies any overly pessimistic conception of this historical period. This is an age in which statist authoritarianism lives on only in vestiges and backwaters. Of course, reactionary campaigns tailored to the sensitivities of these more democratic populations need not be militaristic. Immigration, and in America 'race', are still potentially toxic wedge issues. In some cases, one can expect that the blame for collapsing employment and social provision will be pinned on ethno-racial minorities, but it is hard to see how the resulting exclusionary measures could even put a dent in the problem.

The radical right politics of the inter-war era depended upon the mobilizing atmospherics of great-power rivalry, drastically sharpened by the perception of a Red menace. Moreover, in the midst of a collapsing world market, a new international order based on a mutant form of autarchic capitalism seemed entirely plausible. (How viable it would have been over the longer term is another matter.) Even if we are moving from a neo-liberalism to new forms of public ownership, tomorrow's stagnant and pacified state capitalisms are unlikely to exhibit the political directiveness of their antecedents from a bygone industrial era of welfare and warfare. Mid-century state capitalisms were briefly dynamic because

their production targets were set by total war and popular mobilization, neither of which are on the horizon today.

Classical inter-imperialist conflicts, violently expediting the renewal of the system along new frontiers of expansion, are no longer compatible with the preservation of the system. Moving in the opposite direction, the scale of the fiscal crisis that all states will be confronting, whether presently debtors or not, may eventually compel them to cut back on military budgets, perhaps on a large scale. Of course, this is not even on the agenda yet in the US, but if insolvency and public-sector shutdowns loom, it is hard to see how this could be deferred indefinitely. As a result, for the time being it is very unlikely that the US will venture forth in new risky, costly expeditions, although it will no doubt do its best to maintain its present commitments. 'Terrorism' is another matter, and can be dealt with more cheaply. But its brief moment of geo-political significance is already passing, even as the West soldiers forth in the Hindu Kush.

Another end of history?

We are now at the end of an Indian summer of reflation American imperial power. What power(s) will be able to uphold and constitute the interests of the world capitalist system as a whole in the coming period? These general interests can only ever have approximate embodiments in the hegemonic centres that stand in for this absent universal dimension. Very few incumbent powers are willing to concede that their particular interests might have to be sacrificed to the universal interests of the larger field of accumulation. If no inter-imperialist struggle to determine a new hegemon is possible, can there be a coordinated multilateral devaluation of debts and inflated assets? It is not clear what kind of system will emerge if neither this nor any functional surrogate to this process occurs.

Giovanni Arrighi's three geo-political projections, laid out in *The Long Twentieth Century*, were that the flight forward into financialized neo-liberalism would only bring a brief prolongation of American hegemony and would have to yield eventually to either a West-run global empire, an East-inflected world market-society, or long-term systemic chaos.²² A full-fledged version of the first possibility can probably be ruled out. But

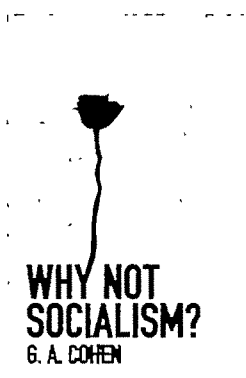
²² Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*, London and New York, pp. 355-6.

following the logic of Arrighi's historical narrative, the emergence of a new hegemonic centre seems equally improbable. After all, each of the successive hegemons in his account was a larger and more advanced capitalist economy than the one that preceded it. By that standard, there is obviously no power in the world that could supersede the US, neither China—at present a considerably smaller and more backward economy—nor 'Europe', which is not even a state, and will soon perhaps begin to abort its historically anomalous quasi-statehood. Japan, once thought to be the nation most likely to succeed, has long since been eliminated from consideration. The most likely development is a combination of possibilities one and three: a concert of powers to stave off financial meltdowns, but incapable of orchestrating a transition to a new phase of sustainable capitalist development.

We are entering into a period of inconclusive struggles between a weakened capitalism and dispersed agencies of opposition, within delegitimated and insolvent political orders. The end of history could be thought to begin when no project of global scope is left standing, and a new kind of 'worldlessness' and drift begins. This would conform to Hegel's suspicion that at this spiritual terminus, the past would be known, but that a singular future might cease to be a relevant category. In the absence of organized political projects to build new forms of autonomous life, the ongoing crisis will be stalked by ecological fatalities that will not be evaded by faltering growth. An observation from Fredric Jameson at the onset of this age of capitalism still frames the present:

Confusion about the future of capitalism—compounded by a confidence in technological progress beclouded by intermittent certainties of catastrophe and disaster—is at least as old as the late nineteenth century; but few periods have proved as incapable of framing immediate alternatives for themselves, let alone of imagining those great Utopias that have occasionally broken on the status quo like a sunburst.¹²

¹² Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory*, p. 644



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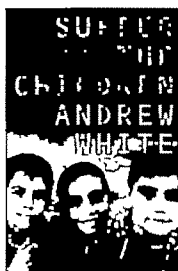
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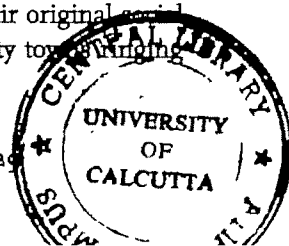
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JAN BREMAN

MYTH OF THE GLOBAL SAFETY NET

MEDIA REPORTS ON the economic meltdown have mainly concentrated on the impact of the crisis on the rich nations, with little concern for the mass of the population living in what used to be called the Third World. The current view seems to be that the setbacks in these 'emerging economies' may be less severe than expected. China's and India's high growth rates have slackened, but the predicted slump has not materialized. This line of thought, however, analyses only the effects of the crisis on countries as a whole, masking its differential impact across social classes. If one considers income distribution, and not just macro-calculations of GDP, the global downturn has taken a disproportionately higher toll on the most vulnerable sectors: the huge armies of the poorly paid, under-educated, resourceless workers that constitute the overcrowded lower depths of the world economy.

To the extent that these many hundreds of millions are incorporated into the production process it is as informal labour, characterized by casualized and fluctuating employment and piece-rates, whether working at home, in sweatshops, or on their own account in the open air, and in the absence of any contractual or labour rights, or collective organization. In a haphazard fashion, still little understood, work of this nature has come to predominate within the global labour force at large. The International Labour Organization estimates that informal workers comprise over half the workforce in Latin America, over 70 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa and over 80 per cent in India; an Indian government report suggests a figure of more than 90 per cent.¹ Cut loose from their original social moorings, the majority remain stuck in the vast shanty towns and slums, city outskirts across the global South.



Recently, however, the life of street hawkers in Cairo, tortilla vendors in Mexico City, rickshaw drivers in Calcutta or scrap mongers in Jakarta has been cast in a much rosier light. The informal sector, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, is 'one of the last safe havens in a darkening financial climate' and 'a critical safety net as the economic crisis spreads'.¹ Thanks to these jobs, former IMF Chief Economist Simon Johnson is quoted as saying, 'the situation in desperately poor countries isn't as bad as you'd think'. On this view, an admirable spirit of self-reliance enables people to survive in the underground circuits of the economy, unencumbered by the tax and benefit systems of the 'formal sector'. These streetwise operators are able to get by without expensive social provisions or unemployment benefit. World Bank economist W. F. Maloney assures the *wsj* that the informal sector 'will absorb a lot of people and offer them a source of income' over the next year.

The *wsj* draws its examples from Ahmedabad, the former mill city in Gujarat where I conducted fieldwork in the 1990s. Here, in the Manek Chowk market—'a row of derelict stalls', where 'vendors peddle everything from beans to brass pots as monkeys scramble overhead'—Surajben 'Babubhai' Patni sells tomatoes, corn and nuts from a makeshift shelter. 'She makes as much as 250 rupees a day, or about \$5, but it's enough to feed her household of nine, including her son, who recently lost his job as a diamond polisher.' Enough: really? Five dollars for nine people is less than half the amount the World Bank sets as the benchmark above extreme poverty: one dollar per capita per day. Landless households in villages to the south of Ahmedabad have to make do with even less than that—on the days they manage to find work.²

Earlier this year I returned to the former mill districts of the city to see how the economic crisis was affecting people there. By 2000, these former working-class neighbourhoods had already degenerated into pauperized quarters. But the situation has deteriorated markedly even since then. Take the condition of the garbage pickers—all of them women, since this is not considered to be man's work. They are now paid half what

¹ 'Decent Work and the Informal Economy', International Labour Organization, Geneva 2002; *Report on the Conditions of Work and Promotion of Livelihoods in the Unorganised Sector*, National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector, Government of India, New Delhi 2008.

² Patrick Barta, 'The Rise of the Underground', *Wall Street Journal*, 14 March 2009.

³ Breiman, *The Poverty Regime in Village India*, Delhi 2007.

they used to get for the harvest of paper, rags and plastic gleaned from the waste dumps on their daily rounds. To make up the loss, they now begin their work at 3 am instead of at 5 am, bringing along their children to provide more hands. The Self-Employed Women's Association, which organizes informal-sector workers in the city, reports that 'incomes have declined, days of work decreased, prices have fallen and livelihoods disappeared'.⁴ Their recent newsletter presents the following table, testifying to the crash in prices for the 'goods' collected on the dumps.

Prices paid to Ahmedabad waste collectors

Items	Price in Rs/kilo		Percentage change
	April 2008	Jan 2009	
Waste steel	6	3	-50
Steel sheets	10	5	-50
Plastic bags	8	5	-37.5
Newspaper	8	4	-50
Hard plastic	15	7	-53
Soft plastic	10	4	-60
Dry bones	4	2	-50
Waste hair	1,000	300	-70

Source: SEWA Newsletter, no. 18, 15 May 2009.

A SEWA activist based in Ahmedabad reports on the anguish she met when visiting local members. One of these, Ranjanben Ashokbhai Parmar, started to cry: 'Who sent this recession! Why did they send it?'

I was speechless. Her situation is very bad, her husband is sick, she has 5 children, she stays in a rented house, she has to spend on the treatment of her husband and she is the sole earner in the family, how can she meet her ends? When she goes to collect scrap she takes along her little daughter, while her husband sits at home and makes wooden ice-cream spoons, from which he can earn not more than 10 rupees a day.

⁴ Self-Employed Women's Association newsletter, *We the Self-Employed*, no. 18, 15 May 2009. SEWA began organizing informal-sector workers in Ahmedabad in the 1970s, and has subsequently expanded its activities across India, and even beyond.

In the industrial city of Surat, 120 miles south of Ahmedabad, half the informal labour force of the diamond workshops was laid off overnight at the end of 2008, with the collapse of worldwide demand for jewels. Some 200,000 diamond cutters and polishers found themselves jobless, while the rest had to contend with drastic reductions in hours and piece-rates. A wave of suicides swept the dismissed workers, who—with a monthly income of little more than \$140—were reputed to belong to the most skilled and highest paid ranks of the informal economy. These bitter experiences of the recession-struck informal economy in Gujarat can be repeated for region after region across India, Africa and much of Latin America. Confronted with such misery it is impossible to concur with the World Bank's and *Wall Street Journal's* optimism about the sector's absorptive powers. As for their praise for the 'self-reliance' of those struggling to get by in these conditions: living in a state of constant emergency saps the energy to cope and erodes the strength to endure. To suggest that these workers constitute a 'vibrant' new class of self-employed entrepreneurs, ready to fight their way upward, is as misleading as portraying children from the *chawls* of Mumbai as slumdog millionaires.

Rural rope's end

The second option currently being touted by the Western media as a 'cushion for hard times' is a return to the countryside. As an Asian Development Bank official in Thailand recently informed the *International Herald Tribune*, 'returning to one's traditional village in the countryside is a sort of "social safety net"'. The complacent assumption is that large numbers of rural migrants made redundant in the cities can retreat to their families' farms and be absorbed in agricultural work, until they are recalled to their urban jobs by the next uptick of the economy. The *IHT* evokes a paradisiacal rural hinterland in northeast Thailand. Even in the dry season,

there are still plenty of year-round crops—gourds, beans, coconuts and bananas among them—that thrive with little rainwater. Farmers raise chickens and cows, and dig fish ponds behind their homes . . . Thailand's king, Bhumibol Adulyadej, has long encouraged such self-sufficiency.³

³ Thomas Fuller, 'In Southeast Asia, Unemployed Abandon Cities for Their Villages', *IHT*, 28 February 2009.

Similar views were published at the time of the Asian financial crisis in 1997. Then, World Bank consultants assumed that agriculture could act as a catchment reservoir for labour made redundant in other sectors, based on the notion that the army of migrants moving back and forth between the country and urban-growth poles had never ceased their primary occupation. The myth persisted that Southeast Asian countries were still essentially peasant societies. These tillers of the land might go to the city to earn extra wages for cash expenditure, but if they lost their jobs they were expected to reintegrate into the peasant economy with no difficulty. This was far from the case, as I wrote then.⁶

Returning to the localities of my fieldwork in Java this summer, I listened to the latest stories of men and women who had come back to the village, having lost their informal-sector jobs elsewhere, and find no work here, either. Of course not: they were driven out of the village economy in the first place because of lack of land or other forms of capital. There is no family farm to fall back on. The departure of the landless and the land-poor was a flight, part of a coping strategy. Now that the members of this rural proletariat have become redundant in Jakarta or Bangkok, or as contract workers in Taiwan or Korea for that matter, they are back to square one, due to an acute and sustained lack of demand for their labour power in their place of origin. A comparable drama is taking place in China. Out of the 120 to 150 million migrants who made the trek from the rural interior to the rapidly growing coastal cities during the last twenty-five years, official sources report that about 10 to 15 million are now unemployed. For these victims of the new economy, there is no alternative but to go back 'home' to a deeply impoverished countryside.

The Asian village economy is not capable of accommodating all those who possess no means of production; nor has the urban informal sector the elasticity to absorb all those eager to drift into it. According to policymakers' notions of cross-sectoral mobility, the informal economy should swallow up the labour surplus pushed out of higher-paid jobs, enabling the displaced workforce to stick it out through income-sharing arrangements until the economic tide turned again. I have never found any evidence that such a horizontal drift has taken place. Street vendors do not turn into *becak* drivers, domestic servants or construction

⁶ See Breman and Gunawan Wiradi, *Good Times and Bad Times in Rural Java: Case Study of Socio-economic Dynamics in Two Villages towards the End of the Twentieth Century*, Leiden 2002.

workers overnight. The labour market of the informal sector is highly fragmented; those who are laid off in their branch of activity have no alternative but to go back 'home', because staying on in the city without earnings is next to impossible. But returning to their place of origin is not a straightforward option, given the lack of space in the rural economy. Nevertheless, my informants do not simply lay the blame for their predicament on the economic meltdown. From the perspective of the world's underclasses, what looks like a conjunctural crisis is actually a structural one, the absence of regular and decent employment. The massive army of reserve labour at the bottom of the informal economy is entrapped in a permanent state of crisis which will not be lifted when the Dow Jones Index goes up again.

New economic order

The transformation that took place in nineteenth-century Western Europe, as land-poor and landless peasants migrated to the towns, is now being repeated on a truly global scale. But the restructuring that would create an industrial-urban order, of the sort which vastly improved the lot of the former peasants of the Northern hemisphere, has not materialized. The ex-peasants of the South have failed to find secure jobs and housing on their arrival in the cities. Struggling to gain a foothold there, they have become mired for successive generations in the deprivation of the shanties, a vast reserve army of informal labour.

In the 1960s and 70s, Western policymakers viewed the informal sector as a waiting room, or temporary transit zone: newcomers could find their feet there and learn the ways of the urban labour market. Once savvy to these, they would increasingly be able to qualify for higher wages and more respectable working conditions. In fact the trend went in the opposite direction, due in large part to the onslaught of market-driven policies, the retreat of the state in the domain of employment and the decisive weakening of organized labour. The small fraction that made their way to the formal sector was now accused of being a labour aristocracy, selfishly laying claim to privileges of protection and security. At the same time, the informal sector began to be heralded by the World Bank and other transnational agencies as a motor of economic growth. Flexibilization became the order of the day—in other words, dismantling of job security and a crackdown on collective bargaining. The process of informalization that has taken shape over the last twenty

years saw, among other things, the end of the large-scale textile industry in South Asia. In Ahmedabad itself, more than 150,000 mill workers were laid off at a stroke. This did not mean the end of textile production in the city. Cloth is now produced in power-loom workshops by operators who work twelve-hour days, instead of eight, and at less than half the wages they received in the mill; garment manufacture has become home-based work, in which the whole family is engaged day and night. The textile workers' union has all but disappeared. Sliding down the labour hierarchy has plunged these households into a permanent social and economic crisis.

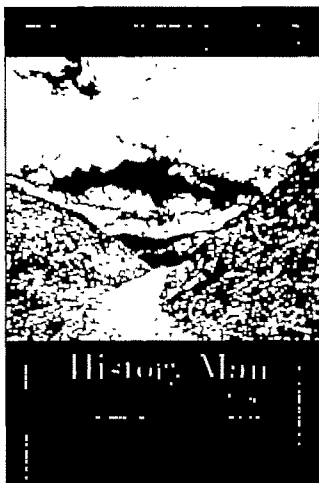
It is not only that the cost of labour at the bottom of the world economy has been scaled down to the lowest possible level; fragmentation also keeps the under-employed masses internally compartmentalized. These people are competitors in a labour market in which the supply side is now structurally larger than the—constantly fluctuating—demand for labour power. They react to this disequilibrium by trying to strengthen their ties along lines of family, region, tribe, caste, religion, or other primordial identities which preclude collective bargaining on the basis of work status and occupation. Their vulnerability is exacerbated by their enforced rootlessness: they are pushed off the land, but then pushed back onto it again, roaming around in an endless search for work and shelter.

The emergence of the early welfare state in the Western hemisphere at the end of the nineteenth century has been attributed to the bourgeoisie's fear that the policy of excluding the lower ranks of society could end in the collapse of the established order.⁷ The propertied part of mankind today does not seem to be frightened by the presence of a much more voluminous *classe dangereuse*. Their appropriation of ever-more wealth is the other side of the trend towards informalization, which has resulted in the growing imbalance between capital and labour. There are no signs of a change of direction in this economic course. Promises of poverty reduction by global leaders are mere lip service, or photo-opportunities. During his campaign, Obama would once in a while air his appreciation for Roosevelt's New Deal. Since his election the idea of a broad-based social-welfare scheme has been shelved without further ado. The global

⁷ Abram de Swaan, *In Care of the State: Health Care, Education and Welfare in Europe and the USA in the Modern Era*, Cambridge 1988.

crisis is being tackled by a massive transfer of wealth from poor to rich. The logic suggests a return to nineteenth-century beliefs in the principle and practice of natural inequality. On this view, it is not poverty that needs to be eradicated. The problem is the poor people themselves, who lack the ability to pull themselves up out of their misery. Handicapped by all kinds of defects, they constitute a useless residue and an unnecessary burden. How to get rid of this ballast?

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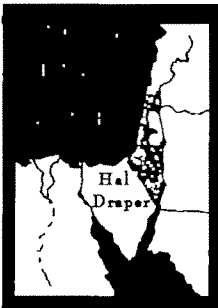
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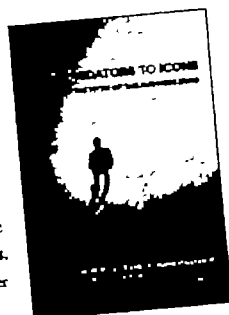
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DEATH OF A COMRADE

Peter Gowan: 1946–2009

WITH THE DEATH of Peter Gowan on 12 June 2009, the international left has lost one of its most astute political analysts, and New Left Review the most generous and steadfast of comrades. Peter was a socialist intellectual of the highest calibre, combining enormous energy and independence of mind with a truly collective spirit. A contributor to NLR from the 1970s, he joined the editorial committee in 1984; his interventions in the journal constitute a substantial body of analysis in their own right. His work was translated into many languages and he had readers on every continent; unlike some, he was incredibly patient in replying to their e-mails. He loved a good argument, although he was always extremely courteous to his critics.¹ For me the loss is also deeply personal. He was a close friend and comrade since we first met as activists in the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign in 1967. There is little that we did not discuss over the last four decades.

Peter was born in 1946, three years after his sister Philippa. They were war babies in the classic sense: their father, a Canadian officer of Scottish ancestry stationed in wartime London, was already married. Their mother, Jean MacDonald, came from a well-off Glaswegian family who were stunned when she broke her engagement to a local and opted for her mysterious Canadian. The two children were born in her father's house in Glasgow. When it was hurriedly sold after his death, she moved to Belfast and brought up the children as a single parent, with occasional 'unofficial' help from her brothers which paid for Peter's education. Philippa and Peter were never to meet their father, something that undoubtedly left a deep mark on him; he discussed it with me at various times over

the years. It was only with the arrival of his own children that the torment over his missing parent lessened, though it never quite disappeared. He himself was a wonderful father to his four sons and spent enormous amounts of time with them and their friends, discussing each and every problem with the same energy that he applied to questions of politics and theory and, in more relaxed moments, to gardening.

Young Gowan was sent to Orwell Park prep school and later to Haileybury College, an institution that had initially been set up in 1806 by the East India Company to educate civil servants destined for the colonies. After 1858 its doors were opened to all, and the school developed a reputation for liberal scholarship. Clement Attlee had been a pupil and a pride in the reforms of his government permeated the school in the 1950s. Peter became a committed supporter of the Labour Party while at Haileybury. It was primarily his sister's influence that pushed him to the left: then a Christian socialist, she was active in CND (led by Canon Collins) and the Anti-Apartheid movement (led by Bishop Ambrose Reeves). At the University of Southampton, as he explains in the interview below, one of his more inspirational lecturers was Miriam Daly, an independent-minded Irishwoman who radicalized him further.¹ She encouraged him to study the Russian Revolution and its legacy, which soon became an obsession. Peter was never satisfied until he had read everything he could possibly lay his hands on, and in this case the literature was enormous. He embarked on post-graduate work at the Centre for Russian and East European Studies at the University of Birmingham, where the staff included the formidable scholar R.W. Davies. But revolution was in the air and he did not finish his PhD; something I never heard him regret.

From 1968 until 1976, Peter was deeply involved as a militant in the International Marxist Group (IMG). What had attracted a number of us to this tiny group was both its considered anti-Stalinism and, more importantly, its intransigent internationalism: it was the British section of the Fourth International, which had activists in every continent, including many who functioned in conditions of clandestinity under the

¹ See his debate with the staunch Blairite FT columnist John Lloyd in NLR 1/216, March–April 1996.

² Daly, whose own father had fought with Michael Collins in the civil war, later returned to Ireland and joined a republican socialist group. She was shot dead by Loyalists in 1980, with the collusion of British Intelligence, according to some. Gowan wrote a moving obituary of her in *Socialist Challenge*.

dictatorships of Latin America and Southern Europe, above all Portugal, Greece and Spain. Revolutionary politics was a full-time engagement; if the routines could be tedious, there was much in this existence that was rewarding. Above all, the world political situation demanded intervention: the Vietnamese resistance to the United States, the Cuban Revolution and Che Guevara's odyssey, the eruption of the working class in France, Italy and Britain, with the huge miners' strike that brought down the Conservative government in 1974, the same year that the Portuguese revolution toppled the dictatorship.

Party loyalties never impeded Peter's independence of mind. In 1967 NLR inaugurated a debate on 'Trotsky's Marxism' with a powerful critique by Nicolas Krassó, one of the left leaders of the Hungarian uprising of 1956, and a member of the NLR editorial committee. The de-Stalinization process in the Soviet Union had semi-rehabilitated Bukharin and other Old Bolsheviks; Trotsky alone remained anathema, and this was the first serious attempt to discuss his legacy within a broader left. Krassó was a former pupil of Lukács, well versed in both the theory and the practice of the official Communist movement. Ernest Mandel despatched a defensive reply. Krassó challenged him once again; Mandel's second reply was more effective.³ I remember well Peter's first response to the initial exchange. 'I agree with Krassó,' he told me. 'Ernest's response is unconvincing.' He forced me to re-read the Krassó text carefully and, while I could see he had a case, *partinost* prevented me from admitting it to anyone except Peter. One outcome was a growing friendship with the Hungarian. In an interview conducted with him shortly before Krassó's death, Peter asked how he would sum up the meaning of the Hungarian revolution. With characteristic wit and mordancy, Krassó replied:

I have often remembered the 19th Party Congress in the Soviet Union in 1952. Stalin kept silent throughout the Congress till the very end when he made a short speech that covers about two and a half printed pages. He said there were two banners that the progressive bourgeoisie had thrown away and which the working class should pick up—the banners of democracy and national independence. Certainly nobody could doubt that in 1956 the Hungarian workers raised these banners high.⁴

³ See Nicolas Krassó, 'Trotsky's Marxism', NLR 1/44, July–Aug 1967; Mandel's reply in NLR 1/47, Jan–Feb 1968; Krassó's response in NLR 1/48, Mar–Apr 1968; and Mandel's rejoinder in NLR 1/56, July–Aug 1969.

⁴ 'Hungary 1956: A Participant's Account', in Ali, ed., *The Stalinist Legacy: Its Impact on 20th-Century Politics*, Harmondsworth 1984.

In February 1968, a group of us in London had decided to launch a new radical newspaper. The poet Christopher Logue was despatched to the Reading Room of the old British Library to research names. He returned with detailed notes on a 19th-century paper, *The Black Dwarf*, whose editor Thomas Wooler had been imprisoned for his scathing attacks on the state perpetrators of the Peterloo Massacre. We decided to revive it on May 1st, 1968. A week later the barricades went up in Paris and one of our correspondents, Eric Hobsbawm, situated them in the continuum of French history. I offered Peter his first job as Distribution Manager of the new *Black Dwarf*. He moved to London immediately, found a squat, and took to his task with gusto, delivering copies of the paper to bookshops in a beat-up van. My fondest memory of him from that period is his returning to our Soho offices at 7 Carlisle Street (a floor below the New Left Review) one day and laughing with delight. That issue had carried an acerbic piece by Robin Blackburn defending Herbert Marcuse against Alasdair MacIntyre, who had written an ultra-critical political biography of the US-based German Marxist for Fontana Modern Masters. We found a photograph of Marcuse, his fist raised as he stood on a platform with Black Panther members. The piece was titled: 'MacIntyre, The Game is Up'. Peter had just delivered the issue to Collets, the radical bookstore on Charing Cross Road that took a hundred *Dwarfs* each fortnight. As he was about to leave he saw the great philosopher stride through the door. MacIntyre went straight to the pile, lifted a copy and began to flick through until he came to the offending headline. Peter described watching him as he pored over Blackburn's assault, turned puce, threw the paper back on the pile and walked out. We were thrilled. It was rare to witness the immediate impact of a text on its target.

The end of the revolutionary wave that had begun with the Tet offensive in Vietnam, early in 1968, came with the defeat of an ill-advised ultra-left insurrectionary attempt in Portugal in November 1975. The previous year a movement led by radical army officers, soldiers, workers and peasants had toppled the senile Salazar dictatorship, using the language of socialism and democracy. The attempt to radicalize the outcome had little mass support and was easily suppressed by the Socialist Party and its allies. The debacle in Lisbon ended all hopes for a revolutionary opening in Europe, and the internal culture of the left soon began to display all the classic symptoms of defeat and demoralization: an unremitting fissiparousness. Peter mostly remained immune to such pettiness. He had started teaching—first at Barking College, then moving

to the University of North London, which later metamorphosed into the London Metropolitan—but had remained deeply engaged in solidarity work with left dissidents in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, partly through contacts with the Ukrainian socialist, Bohdan Kravchenko. It was through this circle that he got to know Halya Kowalsky, whom he married in 1973.

Eastern Europe

From the mid-70s Peter was increasingly convinced that the West European left should be intervening more effectively in the underground debates that were taking place in the East. This was the starting point for *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, a magazine launched in 1977 with the support of broad sections of the left, including social-democratic and euro-communist MPs, and a talented editorial board including Patrick Camiller, Günter Minnerup and Gus Pagan. Halya was an indispensable part of the operation, both politically and technically: 'her integrity, sensitivity and generosity', Peter wrote in *The Global Gamble*, 'have been an inspiration as well as a great support.' Her no-nonsense approach was often brought to bear when Peter let his imagination run away with him. In the early days Halya used to lay out the whole magazine. I retain a warm memory of her walking into the IMG headquarters in Upper Street with her newborn son, Ivan, going straight down to the awful basement where the print-shop was located, parking her baby on the table and sitting down to typeset an entire issue of *Labour Focus*.

Over the next twenty years, the journal would publish texts from Jacek Kuron, Petr Uhl, Václav Havel, Rudolf Bahro, Roy and Zhores Medvedev, Tamara Deutscher and others, along with documents, debates and analysis from Charter 77, Soviet workers' struggles, East European feminists and greens and, in 1980, the whole run of Solidarność Strike Bulletins. While it included contributions by and about all trends of the opposition in Eastern Europe, *Labour Focus* was, editorially and ideologically, a consciously socialist journal—and a refutation of the notion that the Western left was complicit in the authoritarian model. It was largely the failure of those regimes to respect workers' social and political rights that led to their downfall, by blocking the possibility of any democratic renewal of socialism. Peter edited it under the pseudonym Oliver MacDonald, his mother's maiden name. He wrote a number of important texts in it during the 1980s—on Poland, Gorbachevism, Soviet secessionism—

and even more after America's Cold War victory: on the EU and Eastern Europe, the role of a united Germany and, in 1999, an entire special issue on the NATO war on Yugoslavia.

Labour Focus had tracked the hollowing out of the Soviet bloc regimes without losing hope that more democratic forms might arise there, on the basis of socialized economies. The transformation of Eastern Europe into satellite states of Washington and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, pushed into socio-economic free fall by American shock therapy, represented a historic defeat for all those who had hoped that something better might arise from the ashes. Unsurprisingly, a few of the team around *Labour Focus* were unsettled. It was in this period that Peter's steadfastness won the day. We had many discussions on what the impact on friends and colleagues would be. He predicted that the trauma would go deep and many would fall by the wayside. This began to happen as early as 1990, when the United States geared up for the attack on Iraq, having first given Saddam Hussein the green light to go into Kuwait. Some on the left chose to see the first Gulf War as the indication of a new and refreshing cosmopolitanism: UN-backed global justice prevailing over a murderous regime, albeit one armed and equipped by the West for the past ten years. More clear-sightedly, Peter saw the war, which secured a huge new US military presence in the Gulf, as a drive to forward imperial interests, wrapped in a liberal humanitarian flag.

Balkan Wars

Soon after came the break-up of Yugoslavia: first the secession of Slovenia and Croatia, urged on by Germany and Austria; then that of Bosnia, with the encouragement of the United States, leading to the horrors of a three-way civil war, with atrocities committed on all sides; and finally, the NATO war on what remained of the old Yugoslav state. A much larger layer of new 'cosmopolitans' now rallied to the NATO banner, arguing that this was a war against 'fascism', 'genocide' and 'tyranny'.⁵ I have rarely known Peter—an incredibly generous-spirited human being, always ready to see the best in people, including a few who were walking

⁵ There were a few tragi-comic interludes, as one-time defenders of the uniqueness of the Yugoslav state tired of using Lenin's texts on national self-determination to defend their own slide and sought comfort at soirées attended by Lady Thatcher—a staunch supporter of bombing Serbia—before moving into the embrace of the US security establishment. Quite a few were to support the war on Iraq in 2003.

disasters—as angry as he was during the assault on Yugoslavia. He was to write more on this single theme than any other conflict in the past or present: in *NLR*, *Socialist Register* and his 140-page essay ‘The Twisted Road to Kosovo’ in *Labour Focus*. While the Western media portrayed the events in Yugoslavia as exclusively the outcome of internal forces, ‘inflamed nationalists’ pushing for disintegration, Gowan pointed to the crucial role played by the Atlantic powers. In 1990, when the vast majority of Yugoslavs opposed any break-up of the country, US policy had insisted on the same ‘shock therapy’ austerity programme that was being meted out to the ex-Comecon countries. The IMF package implemented by the Yugoslav prime minister Ante Marković, with Jeffrey Sachs’s assistance, had been ‘a critical turning point in the tragedy’, plunging the country into crisis and depriving the federal government of any substance. With the state exchequer reduced to penury, an unpaid soldiery can become a destabilizing factor, as Oliver Cromwell had understood.

Peter was sharply critical of the German initiatives that had exacerbated the crisis and led directly to the declaration of Croatian independence.⁶ He saw the US drive—for the ‘self-determination’ of a ‘Bosnian nation’ that did not exist, politically or constitutionally, and which would inevitably pit Bosnian Serbs and Croats against Bosnian Muslims—as aimed at seizing the leadership of the Yugoslav crisis from Bonn. Rather than protecting the population, Washington’s overriding pre-occupation was to ensure that Western Europe remained subordinate to its direction—not at all evident in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, with NATO apparently redundant and a huge new German sphere of influence opening up in Central Europe, potentially stretching from the Mediterranean to the Baltic. He fiercely condemned a ‘system of Western power-politics’ which could ‘casually and costlessly make a major contribution to

⁶ His view was confirmed by the SPD leader, Oskar Lafontaine at a May Day 1999 speech in Saarbrücken, a few weeks after he resigned as Finance Minister: ‘I often hear it said that Germany shouldn’t go its own way, but I must remind you that at the very beginning of all this, Germany did indeed go its own way in pushing through the official recognition of the independence of Yugoslavia’s constituent republics, against the resistance of Paris, London and Washington . . . Freedom and self-determination are not compatible with national exclusion and ethnic exclusion. Freedom and self-determination are only imaginable when they are linked to solidarity and human fellowship. That’s why it was wrong to give recognition to this small-state nonsense (*Kleinstaaterei*) based on ethnic differences. It was also a mistake when NATO bombardment made it possible for Croatia to drive the Serbs from Krajina’: Ali, ed., *Masters of the Universe: NATO’s Balkan Crusade*, London 2000.

plunging Yugoslavia into turmoil and wars, use these wars to further their geopolitical ends, and then to seek to make political capital out of war crimes tribunal judgements of perpetrators of atrocities, while themselves refusing all responsibility.⁷ A Western policy that put the human security of the Balkan people first would have taken an entirely different route: a development-oriented framework for the whole region. In recent years he would talk of the squalid UN protectorates that littered the Balkans and compare them to what might have been. Instead, social destruction on a massive scale had been the price of a historic political victory for American leadership, with European public opinion won over to the use of NATO as a 'humanitarian' force in US wars of choice and to the legitimacy of bombarding non-aggressor states.

'Globalization'

From 1990, Peter's work focused increasingly on analysing the strategic goals of the American and European elites as they collaborated to restructure the post-Cold War world. His starting point, as always, was that, since policy-making in state executives and multilateral institutions is largely closed to public scrutiny, to understand how state power is being wielded, and to what ends, requires delving into the detail of backstage negotiations and 'mapping back' onto the *cui bono* of policy outcomes. He insisted, too, on the highly political nature of financial and economic institutions, and the statecraft they entailed. His 1999 book *The Global Gamble* took issue with notions that 'globalization' was the outcome of organic economic processes, and set out a compelling case for viewing the transformation of the world economy in the 1990s as crucially driven by the highly political moves of operatives of the 'Dollar-Wall Street Regime' in Washington and New York. Talk of a 'global financial market' obscured the fact that, since the 1980s, the vast bulk of international financial activity has been centred in Wall Street or its 'satellite', the City of London. 'Those who believe the adjective "American" is redundant', he argued, should ask themselves what difference it would make if the international financial system were dominated by markets and operators in China, let alone Iran.

The Global Gamble traced the origins of the Dollar-Wall Street Regime to the restructuring of the international monetary system by the Nixon

⁷ 'The NATO Powers and the Balkan Tragedy', NLR 1/234, March-April 1999.

administration in the 1970s, motivated by the onset of the 'long downturn' in the productive sector and a privileging of finance-capital interests. The post-Bretton Woods switch from gold to dollar-based floating exchange rates provided an immensely powerful mechanism through which Washington and the US-led international financial institutions could effect changes in the global economic environment. The crises created by the resulting volatility in currency swings and capital flows were used in turn by the IMF to restructure other national economies along neoliberal lines. For Gowan, 'neoliberalism' was not simply a free-market ideology but a social engineering project. Externally, it involved opening a state's political economy to products and financial flows from the core countries, under the name of globalization. Internally, it meant the remaking of the state's domestic social relations 'in favour of creditor and rentier interests, with the subordination of productive sectors to financial sectors, and a drive to shift wealth, power and security away from the bulk of the working population'. The trend of privileging 'the interests of rentiers and speculators over the functional requirements of productive investment' led to a hypertrophied expansion of derivatives trading. Presciently, he judged the 'gamble of globalization' as 'destabilizing—and probably economically unviable', bringing 'chronic financial instability' and 'locking the economy's fate into the performance of securities markets'. Yet economic weakness was combined with 'extraordinary political success': the United States had faced no significant threat or challenger.⁸

In contrast to the passive or subjectless formulations—'war broke out'—of mainstream analyses, Gowan's writing always emphasized the role of human agents: strategic policy elites, high state functionaries, military planners, actively pursuing particular class or national interests. If his approach runs the risk of overstating intentionality and understating structure, as was sometimes suggested in NLR internal discussions, in this depoliticized age the over-correction is an invaluable one. His work was always addressed to an audience of potential activists, movers and shakers in a project of world reform. He wrote to reveal—to denaturalize—the workings of contemporary capitalist power, to help a democratic public 'exercise its responsibility to influence the behaviour of states in which we are living'. He was an organic intellectual of the left, in the classical Gramscian sense—though alas, functioning in a locale where there was no mass socialist party.

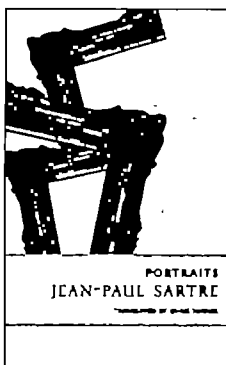
⁸ *The Global Gamble: Washington's Faustian Bid for World Dominance*, London and New York 1999, pp. vii–xi.

Tall and broad-chested, with a full-bodied laugh, Peter was a strong man who could have had another twenty years if he had not been struck down at the age of 63 by mesothelioma, an asbestos-related cancer impossible to detect before the final implosion (probably contracted in the ramshackle postwar building that housed Barking Tech). On holiday in Canada in the summer of 2008, the month before he was diagnosed, he was running six miles a day. He faced up to his death with extraordinary calm, good cheer and courage. His last essay, 'Crisis in the Heartland' in NLR 55, written after his first course of chemo, is a bravado analysis of the 2008 meltdown, ending with a call for a public-utility credit system. He retained his full intellectual powers to the end, and in the final weeks recorded a long set of interviews with Michael Newman and Marko Bojcun, his colleagues and friends at the London Metropolitan University, from which we are proud to publish extracts below. A Leninist to the last, he planned his funeral in meticulous detail with his family, and went out to Country Joe's Vietnam Song—'Gimme an F!

'I'm so glad I'm a materialist,' he told me, as he lay dying. No nonsense to believe in. We all have to go sometime, and the only difference was that he knew when. It was too soon—he had books to write and promises to keep; but death held no fears. In the last phone conversation I had with him we talked about Afghanistan, comparing the current war to its equally appalling predecessors. I read him a verse from a Kipling poem, reflecting the mood in the late 19th century when Winston Churchill had been a young officer in the region:

When you're wounded and left on Afghanistan's plains,
And the women come out to cut up what remains,
Just roll to your rifle, and blow out your brains.
And go to your God like a soldier.

Peter roared with delight. It is a sound I will treasure.



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Jean-Paul Sartre

Translated by Chris Turner

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Translated by Gila Walker

Photographs by Ryan Lobo

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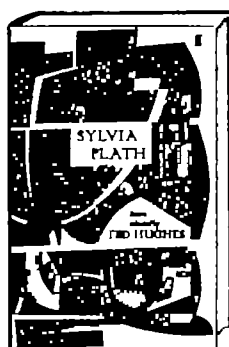
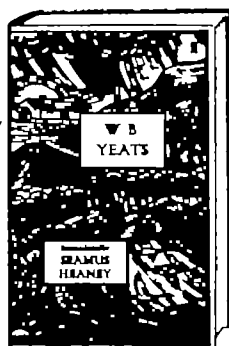
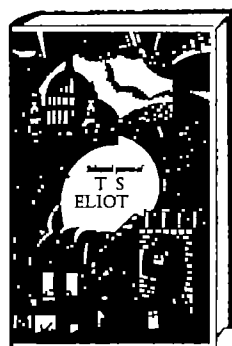
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PETER GOWAN

THE WAYS OF THE WORLD

Interview by Mike Newman and Marko Bojcun

Could you tell us about your early life and education?

I WAS BORN IN Glasgow in 1946 and then moved to Belfast with my mother and sister, where we lived until I was eight. (Our father was a Scottish Canadian who had spent his wartime leave with our mother, but went back to his wife and family in Canada at the end of the war.) When I was nine I was sent to a prep school in England, and then to Haileybury and Imperial Service College. This was the old East India Company school, established to train the colonial administrators who would run India, and was a hotbed of Benthamism. It had what you might call a Labour imperialist tradition: Attlee had been there, and quite a number of other Labour ministers. This was in the 1950s, when Britain not only continued to have an empire, but still thought of itself as being at the centre of the world. We therefore had a much greater awareness of what was going on in the world than a lot of school students do today—and also a much greater sense that what Britain decided, mattered. The school combined a strong link with the empire—the chapel walls were covered in plaques commemorating old boys who'd died on the Khyber Pass—with a tradition of social concern for the poor. I think of it as a kind of Milnerism, after Lord Milner, although the ethos goes back earlier than that: the idea that the state should be run by a dedicated elite, combined with the idea of the empire as a lever for global progress.

And did you share this general outlook?

Absolutely. I was the editor of the school magazine, and my editorials were full of these sentiments. I was a staunch Labour supporter, very

much in favour of nationalization. My older sister, whom I admired greatly, was both a Christian and a socialist, and I took her ideas very seriously. In addition to that I developed a strong Third Worldist orientation. At school I had been following the ending of the empires very closely, not least in Africa. But the big experience for me came during my gap year, between school and university. I was hitchhiking my way round Europe and North Africa, and met up with a young Swedish boy on the border of Tunisia and Algeria. We travelled through Algeria and Morocco together, up into Spain. Dick was the first Communist I'd ever met. He was only eighteen, an engineer in a factory in Gothenburg and a member of the Young Communist League, rather well-educated politically. We had huge arguments about the British role in the Congo. I insisted that British policy was to support the UN in bringing an end to the secession of Katanga, which the Belgians were backing. Dick informed me I was talking rubbish: the British were out to sabotage Congolese independence and were actively engaged, militarily, on the side of the Belgians. They had sent their troops from Northern Rhodesia into Katanga. All the stuff at the UN was just a ruse. I rejected his arguments. I had been reading *The Times* pretty religiously, and was sure of my ground. But when I came back to England, and read the accounts of the Congo crisis by Thomas Hodgkin and Conor Cruise O'Brien, I realized Dick was right and I was wrong. This was a huge shock, not because of the details of the Congo, but because I realized that *The Times* had been systematically lying about what the British were up to there. It started me thinking that the world was much more complicated than I had imagined.

In 1964 you went to the University of Southampton to read Modern History, Politics and Economics. How did these ideas develop while you were there?

At Southampton I specialized in Irish economic history, 1780–1820, taught by Miriam Daly. There was very little secondary literature, so we worked on primary materials. Miriam got us thinking about different methods of interpretation, comparing classical economists' approaches to the peasant problem with those of Marxists. I began to see that Marxism could provide some powerful analytical tools for this kind of work. I was also reading about Africa, not very systematically: the Mau Mau movement in Kenya and Nkrumahism in Ghana. From 1965 we were following what was going on in Vietnam. American draft-dodgers started to appear in Britain and they were an important influence on us, as was the Civil Rights movement in the United States. A Malaysian

student, very anti-imperialist, got me into reading *New Left Review*, and that was very exciting. I was also very interested in the Cuban revolution. Finally, I had a class on European history from 1870 and in that I read Deutscher on the Russian Revolution. That was a huge emotional and intellectual experience for me.

All these interests went on in parallel to a conventional left social-democratic approach to the Wilson government. I was in the University Labour Club and attended the Labour Students national conferences, which was where I first encountered the British far left: the CP, the International Socialists, and some Fourth International people organized around a paper called *The Week*, who would later form the International Marxist Group. I didn't join the IMG at this time, but I liked them because, firstly, they were strongly in favour of working in the Labour Party, and I took the view that there was no point in fantasizing that the British working class was something other than it was: the labour movement in Britain was Labour and the trade unions, and we had to be in it—that was a kind of duty. Secondly, they were very involved in the anti-imperialist movement, not least on Vietnam. The third thing that drew me was the double-sidedness of their view of the Soviet Union: that, beneath an appalling, massively distorted political system, it did have an emancipatory impulse buried somewhere; it was not a capitalist state. I had been on a student trip to the Soviet Union in 1966, and at Moscow State University the atmosphere among students was still relatively open. They spoke to me quite freely about the beginnings of repression under Brezhnev in 1966, and about how upset they were over the trials of the writers, Sinyavsky and Daniel. I felt then that there was the possibility of movement and reform there. And, by contrast, I was *quite* sympathetic to the Communist Party, but not at all so to International Socialism—mainly because I had gone along to hear Chris Harman on the Cuban Revolution. I was shocked by the animus of his speech, and hostility towards Castro. There was something very narrow and Jesuitical about it, completely cut off from the reality of a tremendous liberation movement in Cuba.

In 1967 you went to the Centre for Russian and East European Studies in Birmingham to do a PhD on the Soviet Union.

Yes, I was studying the Civil War period in the province of Tambov. This was the only grain-surplus province that remained with the Soviets

throughout the fighting. And then, as soon as the Civil War was over, there was a very powerful uprising in Tambov, led by people from the Social Revolutionaries, more or less at the same time as the Kronstadt rebellion. It was known as the *tambovshchina*, a kind of anarchist revolt against the Soviets led by peasants, school teachers, and so on. Nobody had written about this, so my task was to go into the primary materials; in part it was an extension of my work on the peasants in Ireland. I greatly admired many of the staff at the Centre, it was a wonderful place. But I was increasingly caught up in political work. I joined the IMG in the late spring of 1968, in Birmingham. The first meeting we organized was about Malcolm X—we got C. L. R. James, the Caribbean Marxist, to come up and give a talk about him. We were deeply involved in the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign. In 1969 I moved down to London to work on the newspaper, *Black Dwarf*, which Tariq Ali was editing, and play a more central role in the IMG leadership—effectively abandoning the PhD.

How did the suppression of the Prague Spring and the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 affect your attitude towards the Soviet Union?

I started to try to find out why it had happened. Of course, there was a ready explanation within the Trotskyist movement, which said that there was a bureaucratic group in power in these societies which had distanced itself from the mass of the population, and was using political repression in order to boost its privileges and its power. This, then, would lead to such things as the suppression of the Prague Spring. But those arguments didn't completely convince me, simply because they didn't explain the Prague Spring itself, which in my view had come rather strongly from above as well as below. Arguably, it was the clashes at the top that had generated a dynamic towards ending censorship. Certainly, we had been very inspired by the changes that were taking place in Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1968, and we led the protests against the invasion outside the Soviet Embassy in London that August. But funnily enough, the invasion didn't initially demoralize us, because we thought it might be quite quickly swept back—we didn't understand the dynamics in Czechoslovakia. It was a big shock when the Dubček leadership failed to mobilize the population, and was ultimately defeated and removed by the spring of 69.

What was your experience in the Fourth International at this time?

I went to the FI's Ninth Congress in Rimini, in 1969. There were people from all over the world—Latin America, the Far East, Europe. Of the leaders of the International at that time, Pierre Frank influenced me the most. He had been in the French Communist Party in the inter-war period and in the Left Opposition internationally, right through the War. His approach was always: the concrete analysis of a concrete situation; nothing in politics was as clear as one might imagine. Ernest Mandel was a very attractive figure, and I was hugely influenced by his book on Marxist economic theory. But I didn't think he was necessarily very reliable on *political* analysis; there was a lot of romanticism in his speech-making.

In the 1970s I became involved in the FI's 'security work', which involved helping people in Latin America or elsewhere who needed false papers, and I was also very active on Eastern Europe. As a result I was travelling a lot: going to Paris almost once a month for the security questions, and organizing deliveries of banned material to Czechoslovakia. Our initial contacts were through the exiled Dubčekite opposition, under the leadership of Jiří Pelikan, which was in close touch with the left opposition in Prague: Josef Smrkovský, Zdeněk Mlynář, Dubček himself and others. I was in charge of this work throughout the 1970s and met some very interesting people there. We would drive vans across the border, taking in books and papers hidden in false compartments, and bringing things out. Doing the hand over of material was always nerve-wracking, as was going across the border itself. On every trip we were bringing in between fifty and a hundred books of one sort or another, a lot of them quite anti-Communist. It became tougher and tougher, and eventually one of our team was stopped on the border. Others took over, and they got arrested and held for a couple of months before being released.

For me, the political perspective was basically a Deutscherite one of building a movement for reform and renewal in the East. I thought the Western left had a significant role to play in this. My experience in east-central Europe was that these states were authoritarian, absolutely; but they weren't totalitarian gangster regimes, terrorizing the population. I also believed that there were reformist elements within the ruling parties, including in the Soviet Union. I was, of course, naive about this. But I was naive mainly about the timing. What I didn't realize was what a profoundly demoralizing experience the crushing of the Prague Spring had been for these reformist forces. The very substantial

constituencies for reform that had existed in the 60s were massively reduced after that.

Which countries were you most involved with?

Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia were the main places I visited. But I was very interested in what was going on inside the Soviet Union. Halya and I made a long trip there in 1975—it was a kind of honeymoon, actually, we travelled all round Ukraine, and it was very useful for getting various *aperçus* on what was happening on the ground there. Towards the end of the 70s I was deeply involved in work on Poland, via two extremely interesting groups. One was a network of psychologists who were working in the big factories and enterprises across the country. It had been established with the backing of the Party leadership after the upheavals of 1970–71, to humanize workplaces, to address the workers' occupational problems and so forth. I was in particularly close contact with a psychologist working in the shipyards in Szczecin. Through him, I got to see the life of the shipyard workers, and in 1980, when the strikes began and Solidarność was being organized, I was in the shipyard more or less from the beginning, and got fantastic access to what was going on there. A second network was a semi-clandestine group at Warsaw University, known as the Sigma Club. It mainly involved Marxists—both lecturers and students—discussing what they perceived to be the crisis in the People's Republic of Poland. Through them I got very detailed reports, provided by sociologists, on the 1976 upheavals in various shipyards, but also at Radom and the big tractor factory at Ursus. I also helped Edmund Baluka, the exiled leader of the strike at the Szczecin shipyard in 1970–71, to re-establish contact with members of his strike committee.

This was my first real contact with the life of the industrial workers in Poland, and the thing that struck me in Szczecin was the high quality of life of the shipyard workers. I stayed in a block of flats which was entirely devoted to shipyard-worker accommodation, and they lived rather well, in Western terms. There was an excellent nursery school, a polyclinic, a supermarket—it was a nice set-up. This confirmed my prejudices, because, fundamentally, I saw these states in the East as being dominated by a kind of labour aristocracy; they were a peculiar kind of labour state, in which working-class people—very often first-generation workers, whose parents had been peasants—were coming through the big factories and going up into positions of authority in the state. They were

often quite authoritarian, reminiscent of the sort of trade-union bosses that you might get in the West—not liberal individualists at all. But for the system to work effectively, they had to maintain the support of the industrial working class.

By the late 1970s there was a crisis in this social system, of a very distinctive kind. There had been a significant opening to the West in the economic field; a growing marketization, and social differentiation. The typical Western representation of politics there was of a Communist monolith in which nothing is going on, and then you have various dissidents, right? That wasn't the situation at all. The great strike movements of 1980 were the outcome, amongst other things, of a massive upheaval inside the Party. At the beginning of 1980 there was a Party Congress at which there was a tremendous revolt from below; people who were clearly earmarked for the top leadership at the beginning of the Congress had been swept away by the end of it. And this revolt was coming from the industrial working class, from Gierek's red bastions: the mines of Lower Silesia, the shipyards.

I was acutely aware of this structural crisis of the Polish state. Up until 13 December 1981 when Jaruzelski carried out the coup d'état, I believed—and I haven't changed my opinion on this—that there could have been a deal between Solidarność and the Communist Party leadership. There was a very strong current in the Party which said that on *no* account should there be a coercive confrontation between the Party and the workers; the military apparatus was a different matter. Secondly, there was another current, especially evident at the base, which wanted to turn the Polish United Workers' Party into a social democratic party—not a vanguard party, but a democratic party in which there were different trends. It was a current that was more or less ignored in the West, but it's not impossible that it might have worked—it had representation in the top leadership of the Party, and good links with Solidarność.

After 13 December 1981, for the first time, I saw the possibility of the collapse of the Soviet bloc. After the coup, Tamara Deutscher organized a dinner one evening with Maria Nowicki, then a senior librarian at the London School of Economics. She had been Gomułka's secretary in the Lublin government in the early 1940s, and a Polish Communist until the 60s. She was close to the philosopher Adam Schaff, and an extremely sophisticated thinker. She agreed with me that this was an *internal* crisis

of the Communist Party; it was not to be understood as the work of some little band of dissidents outside; nor should one think that Polish society was groaning under a totalitarian yoke, and was ready to throw it off at the first opportunity: actually society and politics there were highly articulated and complex. But she doubted that the energies existed for a socialist development project in Poland. She thought the Jaruzelski coup was probably the end of the story; instead you would see demoralization, decay and all kinds of Catholic currents coming up. I didn't really have an answer to that; I thought about what she said repeatedly, and felt that she was right. The concept of demoralization struck me as especially important. During the 1980s, Polish society and the intelligentsia were undoubtedly in decline. The idea that 1989 was some kind of springtime of the peoples was a travesty of the actual mood in Poland: it was the very opposite, as you can tell from the derisory turnout in the first free elections, in 1989. It was a deeply demoralized society, full of ideological and political contradictions which became very clear after 1989.

Could we go back and talk about the journal Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, which you started in 1977?

The idea of *Labour Focus* was very straightforward: it was to champion a democratic opening not on the basis of capitalist restoration but of a continued nationalized economy, although of course this didn't exclude economic reforms. We would press for democratic change, freedom of speech—all essentially liberal political demands, but from a clearly leftist source; and we would seek to engage with Communists in the East along these kinds of lines. We also published as much documentary material as we could from leftist dissidents—not least in the Soviet Union—and information about movements from below.

We had all kinds of intriguing figures coming along and offering us substantial pecuniary benefits, if only we would see the light and make some small adaptations to what we were doing. I remember, in particular, there was a guy called Roy Godson—I'm not sure which agency he was actually working for, the CIA or one of the others—and I had a cloak-and-daggerish meeting with him at Stratford station, in east London. He offered me a five-figure sum, a lecture tour of the United States—all I had to do was get rid of any actual communists on the *Labour Focus* editorial board!

How did you view the arrival of Gorbachev and the period after 1985?

Zdeněk Mlynář had told me that if Gorbachev came to power there would be massive changes along the lines of liberalization and democratization in the Soviet Union. He was a longstanding friend of Gorbachev, they had been room-mates at Moscow State University in the early 50s. Gorbachev's speech at the Party Congress in 1986 very much bore out Mlynář's analysis. But it became clear that, although the Gorbachev project confirmed the Deutscherite idea that there could be a significant push for democratization, nevertheless, Gorbachev could not take the necessary final leap to a new basis of legitimation in democratic, electoral victory. And that was a critical weakness. I actually believed, initially, that Yeltsin might be a better bet, because he was ready to take this on. Unfortunately, Yeltsin got bought out by a different project, and turned out to be a pretty disastrous demagogue.

What did you think needed to be done that Gorbachev wasn't doing?

There needed to be a *Rechtsstaat*—a state governed by law; a democratic political system in which there could be, in principle, pluralism; obviously it would be a federal system in the Soviet context. Then there was the question of economic reform, and here, Gorbachev clearly got things badly wrong. But essentially the problem was that, during the Brezhnev period, the *nomenklatura* and *party aktiv*, to use their jargon—the top officials of Communism—had acquired an increasingly corrupt and comfortable lifestyle. Not that they were fabulously rich, but corruptly, securely well off. Gorbachev was a pain in the neck—threatening the whole thing—and they responded by wanting to go the whole hog: to protect their new property rights, and grab more, through becoming a private capitalist class. That trend was very powerful. Putting it another way, the demoralization of the Soviet *nomenklatura* was very strong. I would say, post-1968. On the other hand, the idea that this transition to capitalism was being pushed for and demanded by the Soviet people is absolute rubbish. It came upon them as an entirely external event of shocking proportions; it was a huge trauma for many, and they couldn't make sense of it. What you had in the 1990s in the post-Soviet Union were deeply demoralized societies, where the great hope was the next bottle of alcohol. That's what was going on there, not some great liberation movement.

How would you describe the effect of the collapse on your political thinking?

Well, of course it was a huge ideological shock. My world-view had been that we were in a historical period of transition from capitalism towards socialism. And the Soviet bloc was, factually, a gain in that direction. I was never dewy-eyed about the Soviet leadership; but in comparison with the kind of racist imperialism that we'd seen in the first half of the twentieth century in Europe—and the United States, if you look at the Pacific War, not to speak of the treatment of the black population—it was a gain. I regarded the Soviet bloc, and the Soviet victory in the Second World War, as not only speeding the collapse of the empires, but also helping to bring the welfare state in Western Europe. So all of this was a huge blow to me. But, alongside that, I didn't change two other opinions: one, that, with the collapse of the Soviet bloc, you would have the Western capitalist states going on the rampage again; so I was much more prepared than many for what has subsequently happened. Secondly, I still basically believed in Marx's approach to history and politics—namely, that the great effort is to move towards freedom. This means something very mundane and straightforward for Marx: it means free time; it means liberating humanity from the realm of necessity, and in order to do this you have to get beyond capitalism. Capitalism has, of course, liberated humanity from a great deal: the forty-hour week, pensions—these were huge gains. Nevertheless, there is an irreducible drive in capitalism to block further progress along these lines, because it is all about creating insecurities and scarcities, and finding ways to exploit the maximum labour for the maximum profit.

Moving to the 1990s, how did you see the process of European integration? Did your views change significantly over time?

Up to the early 1990s, I didn't have any settled view on European union. I found myself torn. I liked Tom Nairn's polemics against British nationalist attitudes towards the EEC; I was not, in principle, hostile to the idea of monetary union—why should one be? But on the other hand, I was pretty appalled by some aspects of the single market, and critical of the legal regime of the EU. I really came towards a view of the European Union through my research on what it was up to vis-à-vis Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s: through studying the EU's so-called technical assistance programme. I was shocked, actually, as I went into the nitty-gritty of what was going on. I have always liked to immerse myself

in the empirical detail of anything that I'm trying to understand; there is an unfortunate tendency among many Marxists to think that there's no need for empirical research—a view completely contradicted by Marx's own gargantuan appetite for empirical investigation, which he thought was absolutely vital to theory. But when you get into the detail, the way things actually work is often much more dreadful than one could imagine. The fact was that the West Europeans adopted a *ruthless* policy of turning east-central Europe into a kind of passive, support hinterland for West European multinationals.

Would it be true to say that, before you reached that conclusion, you'd actually seen some potential for the European Union—led, perhaps, by France and Germany—to defend or promote a European social model against Anglo-Saxon trends in the United States and Britain?

Yes, to some extent. But the main idea was slightly different: namely, that American elites were extremely worried about that possibility. It was the United States' concern about the potentials of Franco-German partnership, rather than its reality, that was driving tensions in the transatlantic relationship. The United States was preoccupied by the danger of losing control of high politics—namely, security politics—to a German or Franco-German effort to give Europe a bigger say on these issues within the alliance. This was crucially at stake in US policy over Yugoslavia.

How do you see the European Union today?

The crucial point is the Hayekian notion of the European Union as negative integration: its function is to *stop* states from exercising their economic sovereignty and deciding freely how they want to organize their capitalism. It is not a Union to construct a positive, integrated, federal Europe. The Hayekian EU preserves the nation-states, retaining these national capitalisms while simultaneously taking out their economic sovereignty. Of course, with the economic crisis, the emphasis on free competition, privatizations, strict controls on state aid and so on turns out to be little more than a house of cards, all resting on the notion that the Anglo-American financial regime would work. When it doesn't, massive state aid is shovelled in and competition policy goes out the window. The monetary union arrangements are totally inadequate for dealing with this crisis. It turns out that banks actually presuppose

authoritative tax-raising bodies to protect them, and no such body exists at an EU level; so they turn back to the national level. And of course, the crisis explodes at the weakest link—the way the two halves of Europe were put together after the Cold War, using east-central Europe as a handy support system for West European capitalism.

Could the European Union in any sense be a semi-independent actor, a counterweight to the United States, or is that possibility a phantom of the past?

The trend, probably, is towards a much greater readiness of the West European states to work very closely with the Americans, and not to engage in any 'irresponsible' activity vis-à-vis China, say, or Iran. I don't think we should expect to see the EU acquiring a more autonomous role. There's another problem: while the United States insisted during the Cold War on controlling Europe's geopolitics very tightly, it simultaneously gave the West European states a significant role in the management of the international political economy—in the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO. Now, with the rise of East Asia, India and China, there has to be reform which will involve a considerable cut in West European influence and voting rights. The same goes for the UN Security Council. What will the European reaction be? As far as the British are concerned, their only solution is to ask: how can we continue to make ourselves useful to Uncle Sam?

How would you summarize the position of the United States today?

The big question now is whether the United States, in practice, retains its hegemony in the international political economy. Can measures taken by the Obama administration turn round the economic situation in the US and lead the world out of economic crisis, or not? The answer to this will be hugely important for the next twenty years. I have a feeling that the measures won't work, because political obstacles inside the United States are too great, including the limits which Obama and Geithner have placed upon themselves. And if Washington *can't* turn things around, then the rest of the world will need to make its own arrangements, which may involve dismantling things that are very important to the US, and some that are very important to the Europeans as well. And then you will get a real crisis of strategy in Washington—what to do in those circumstances? But this is a practical question for the future; whether or not the US loses its hegemony will not be determined by intellectual activity on our part; it will be decided in the real world. The

key question is, does the American strategy elite have the capacity, the resourcefulness and imagination to adapt? My impression is that, on the political-economy front, it probably does not. On foreign-policy issues there has been a substantial degree of rebranding after Bush. There was a general elite consensus on the need for that, which the Obama administration represents. But on key neuralgic issues, whether it is America's right to engage in what they call pre-emptive war, or extraordinary renditions, Obama has been very careful to stay within the consensus.

Looking back, would you say that there is a constant set of themes that characterizes your work?

What is probably distinctive about my work is its jack-of-all-trades dimension: interdisciplinary, if you like. I've always been interested in thinking across politics and economics, and thinking in historical terms. Hayek said: someone who is only an economist is no economist, and I would say the same about politics. These categories—economics and politics—which are treated as utterly autonomous within conventional thought, are absolutely imbricated with each other, in very complicated ways. The second thing is that I don't, on the whole, have the courage to write in the field of general theory; instead, I write in a kind of analytical mode. Analytical work has narrow parameters—it's confined to particular times and particular spaces, and doesn't claim truth across all ages; and much of my work is also contemporary. When I write, I do try to look downwards, if you like, towards the empirical, and upwards towards the theoretical. But I also find that when you get into this kind of work, you discover the specificities of relationships and dynamics which are much more peculiar and distinctive than one could ever have imagined. Last point: I consider myself to be at the opposite extreme from, say, Gerry Cohen in his *Marx's Theory of History*, in that I do not think that economic and technological determinism can explain anything. This economic-technological determinism, what I would call 'mechanical materialism', is the approach of the classical political economists: Adam Smith and Ricardo. It's quite extraordinary to me that such a huge number of Marxists have adopted it; Marx himself spent his life doing what he called a *critique* of political economy—i.e. of that mechanical approach. I think it is very helpful to make a distinction between the constitutive and the causal: the ontological significance of capitalism, of that social structure, is fundamental for understanding modern politics, and modern economics. But that doesn't

at all mean that you should start with what's going on in the capitalist economy to find the causes of conflicts and changes.

Could you explain that a little further?

Well, by 'ontological' I mean a very simple thing: your theory of what the world—the social world—is made up of. The standard approach in Western social science—the one used by Weber, but it's an ideology that's become as naturalized as the air people breathe—is an atomistic one: that the world is essentially made up of individuals. In addition, the individuals may be pushed by certain drives; Weber would say by rational drives in the economic field and by non-rational drives in the political field. But Marxists have taken the view that there are big objects out there which are not atomistic: social structures such as capitalism, for example, that are changing and shaping the everyday world. When we are looking at contemporary developments—say, in international politics—we need to ask ourselves what kind of ontological assumptions we are making, and what they imply for our analysis.

You've written on international political economy, historical thinkers—Schmitt, Kant, Grotius, De Maistre—and political institutions, such as the UN. Are there any areas that you feel happiest working in?

In terms of subject-matter, I don't think so. What I have always found myself doing is taking up issues where I think there is a crisis in conventional approaches, but where there isn't an obvious answer from anybody else. Often the result of this is that I find myself, in the first instance, drawing upon heterodox work which is not necessarily Marxist. Sometimes I get pulled to heterodox, non-Marxist positions, and sometimes towards what I would take to be more strictly Marxist ones. But it's very important to keep oneself open to the material.

How does your work on financial systems relate to both Marxist and non-Marxist thinking?

That's a good question. In the 1990s there was a tremendous amount of energy around the idea of what was called financial globalization. The notion was championed right across the political spectrum—there were plenty of Marxists who bought into it, as well as liberals and conservatives. What was common to these ideas was the mechanical materialism

of the classical political economists—or, if you like, utilitarians—that I referred to before: the notion that what is going on is an organic development within the world economy, proceeding from the national, and therefore the international, towards the global in the field of finance. It is no good pretending that you can escape this development; you simply have to accept it and operate on its basis.

Now, I approach this with great scepticism. To me, what was called financial globalization seemed to be radically counter-intuitive, even within a capitalist logic. To give a simple example: there were huge swings in exchange rates between the main currencies, the dollar, euro and yen. These swings are completely counter-efficient for international investment across currency zones: you cannot calculate the profitability of you, as a German, making an investment in the dollar zone over the next five years, when you have no idea whether the dollar is going to be 100 per cent up or 100 per cent down against the euro. The privatization of exchange-rate risk involved in 'financial globalization' seemed to be a regression from the international to something much more primitive and imperial. I found the work of Susan Strange—a sort of progressive Weberian—and a number of other heterodox thinkers very helpful on this. From Strange I gained a lot of insights on the importance of the global monetary system, and the significance of the United States' destruction of the Bretton Woods architecture. My position has been at the opposite end of the spectrum from the globalization-theory people. I have not accepted the idea that national capitalisms have been transcended; any notions of that sort I regard as simply false. So, too, of course is the notion that national capitalisms were ever autarkic: ever since the British constructed a genuine world market in the late eighteenth century, there has always been a global market. I came to the conclusion that the real-world referent of what people talk about as financial globalization has got the Stars and Stripes tacked all over it: it's an American system.

Then one needs to ask why, and how does it fit in with other things we know about the United States? In the early 1970s, when the Bretton Woods system collapsed, I took the view, under the influence of Mandel, that it was a devastating blow to the dollar and to American dominance; now, I've come to exactly the opposite view—that it was a breathtaking assertion of American dominance over the rest of the capitalist world. Robert Wade, at LSE, has quite rightly said that my work on all this has rather a one-eyed character. Certainly, my thinking on this has been

modified since I wrote *The Global Gamble*—in particular, as I acknowledged in *Critical Asian Studies* a few years ago, I underplayed the extent to which this system of dollar dominance rested upon co-operation from East Asia. That is an example of what was one-eyed in the earlier system of thinking. But it doesn't actually involve a huge transformation of the main argument.

You describe your work as fundamentally Marxist, but how would you react to the suggestion that, actually, what really interests you is power, and particularly US state power, and to some extent, you interpret international developments through that prism? What would you say to the idea that there's a pretty strong dose of realism in your approach?

Well, first of all, I have never actually said that I regard my work as 'fundamentally Marxist'. I *do* regard it as being inspired by Marxism, and I would hope that the insights which Marx has provided do genuinely influence my work. But I am pulled all the time in different directions. Secondly, I am very much interested in relations of power—not least because they are so commonly denied in liberal thought, sometimes naively, sometimes disingenuously; and liberal thought tends to downplay the coercive dimensions of international politics. But one of my claims to have made a theoretical contribution is my critique of American neo-realism, and in particular of Mearsheimer's work.¹ My critique hinges on one core assumption of American neo-realism, which in my view is completely false in a capitalist world: that at the centre of world politics there is a struggle between states for their very existence—an assumption that is crucial to the whole neo-realist architecture. Empirically, I think this is quite false for the advanced capitalist states in the twentieth century. There was a tremendously violent war between, say, the United States and Japan in the Pacific, and one side won. So, presumably, the state that lost was wiped off the face of the earth, if states are involved in a struggle for their very existence. Well, Japan is still there—it wasn't like that; far from it. You might say Germany is a bit more complicated because it was split. That's perfectly true; but it was partitioned for reasons that realists have nothing to say about: namely, because of the social-system divide between the two great powers. Again, German capitalism and the German state—the FRG—was revived after it was smashed to the ground in the Second World War.

¹ 'A Calculus of Power', NLR 16, July–August 2002.

So as far as advanced capitalist states are concerned, there are simply no grounds for this claim that they are in a fight for their existence. Of course, in the rise and spread of capitalism, lots of states have disappeared: almost all the indigenous states of Africa and the Americas were destroyed. But as capitalism spreads and consolidates across the world, the main powers are increasingly reluctant to tamper with the division of the world into different geographical states. Look at the Americans in Iraq: they didn't go down the road of breaking the whole thing up. The real drive of capitalist states is not to wipe other capitalist states off the face of the earth; it's to change their internal regimes, again something that realists don't concern themselves with. Capitalism involves an endless struggle for value streams, and the social preconditions for the right kinds of value streams to come out of different areas—and capitalist states get very agitated if other states create spheres of influence which cut them out of the value stream. So there are tremendous efforts to restructure the internal regimes of states, along with, of course, efforts to restructure the *external* regimes. One of the absurdities in so much of the orthodox economic discussion is the way people talk about markets: 'the market' does this, 'the market' does that. Markets are like clothes—all shapes and sizes. And how a market is shaped—who wins in it—is a hugely important political question.

How do you see the relationship between capital in the US and state power? Who are the agents behind particular state policies—how does the state determine what its policy is?

Firstly, the United States is in a lot of difficulties at the moment. Given what I've said about the importance of regime-shaping, the extent to which leading states can actually solve the problems of other capitalisms, in a way that enables them to flourish, is a very big issue. Power, in that context, is the capacity to give a development perspective to others. In my opinion, American claims to be able to do that are under huge challenge right now.

When it comes to the relationship between state and capital, this varies, of course, very greatly, between states. But I think Marx's approach is still a very important one: the state as the committee that tries to work out the strategic problems of its own national capitalism, and the solutions to them. There is a tendency to collapse the notion of capitalist class into the idea that the state is an aggregate of CEOs of big companies. I think

that's quite wrong. Some of these CEOs may be into politics—may be into thinking synthetically and strategically; others, not. But why *should* a CEO have strategic vision for a whole class? It's the task of the state executive to come up with that vision and the capacity to implement it. Of course, the state executive does this in dialogue with other leaders who emerge from within the ranks of capital, who turn out to be capable and persuasive. But there needs to be some distance and some tension between the 'committee' that tries to take a strategic view and the chief executives of different companies—the individual capitals, if you like.

The peculiarity of the United States is, first, that it is, to an extraordinarily complete degree, a bourgeois democracy—a democracy in which the power and wealth of capital has sway over virtually every field of policy-making. More: there is almost no barrier to individual American capitalists building mafias of influence to block or control policy. There is no autonomous, if you like, state committee. And this is an anomaly—and a weakness: when Washington has to make strategic turns, it's very difficult to do so. One is seeing that now, when the US really needs to think through an alternative relationship between its financial sector and its industrial economy. It is particularly hard for it to do this because, historically, the way the US has given itself a strategic vision—a capacity to think synoptically about its problems—has been through recruiting investment bankers from Wall Street, and lawyers from giant New York or Washington law firms. The result has been that Wall Street has had an extraordinarily big political role in Washington, because the investment banker has had a global view. But also, ensconced in the centres of power in Washington, one is going to be feathering one's own nest, because that's the American way. In Europe, there was a different approach, much more elitist: a mandarinat, most classically in Britain and in France. Historically, these mandarinates have had the capacity to integrate thinking and produce strategic ideas for the forward path of the state. In the British case, it took a hammering under Thatcher, and from the subsequent Americanization of the British policy-making system. One result is that the Treasury, along with other parts of the senior civil service, has been pretty much gutted of the capacity to do anything at all. So in Britain there is neither a mandarinat nor any particularly developed, sophisticated private-business bunch capable of acting as the committee for capital.

How do you see the future world outlook?

The fall of the Soviet bloc was a world-changing event. With it, the whole symbolic order and discourse of Communism collapsed, and socialism as a set of ideas ceased to have resonance on an international scale. Now there are very few theorists on the left who are continuing to do research on positive left alternatives to the capitalist order. Yet the last two decades don't suggest that the Atlantic world's resources really offer development potential to the rest; globalization hasn't done that. I think new movements for world reform will arise, because some of the contradictions that Marx wrote about cannot be resolved; they are going to create more and more problems. One of these is the planet of slums that Mike Davis speaks of: hundreds of millions of people living in these megacities, expelled from proper insertion in the international division of labour, and experiencing a terrible social and economic degradation. Another is the inability of capitalism to transcend the nation-state, and therefore the constant swinging between two choices: either free trade, which is a form of imperialism, because the strong dominate the market; or protectionism, which is a form of mercantilism, leading towards political conflict. So I think there will be a need to look for a radical alternative.

Will these radical alternatives be taken up by parts of the insider intelligentsia, within capitalism, distancing themselves from class interests and class logic? History doesn't show many examples of this happening without the threat of some very big social challenge. We won't get radical alternatives coming out of the current economic crisis; that's already clear in the Anglo-Saxon world from what they're doing at the moment. There were some pretty radical alternatives after Stalingrad, in the 1940s—genuine rethinking about how to organize things in the Western world. The thirty glorious years of growth and development were to some extent down to the idea that, in Western Europe, it was necessary to build a multi-class democracy, not just a narrow bourgeois democracy; and to a degree that became a reality in north-west Europe. But as soon as the Soviet Union collapsed, all this went out the window. That's unfortunate, because the West European multi-class, social-democratic model was a genuine advance over anything that we've seen anywhere else.

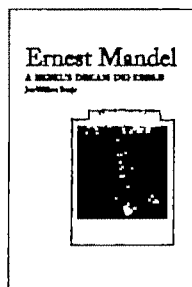
Reflecting on all the work you've done, what are you most proud of, and why?

I think the thing that makes me most proud, insofar as it is true, has been my effort to perceive what's going on in the world from a non-provincial perspective: to try to make sense of it from the angle of the the great

mass of the world's population. That applies not only to my research, but also to my teaching—I think it is very important for young people to be shaken out of nationalist prejudices and falsehoods. It's been a huge satisfaction to me that, in my work, I've been able to keep that going. As to whether one has come up with anything in the intellectual field that is going to restructure the way some people think about the world, I would be extremely modest in this area. But I think there have been some benefits to the left from some of the debates I've been involved in. I don't want to exaggerate the importance of these debates in changing the way the world operates. But I do think that, ultimately, we're going to see a new movement for world reform; and in that movement, the role of intellectuals will certainly be important—and I hope that some of what I've written will at least help to set the record straight on a few questions for a new generation of intellectuals coming forward with projects for that movement.

From January to June 2009, Marko Bojcin and Mike Newman, friends and colleagues of Peter Gowan at London Metropolitan University, recorded a series of interviews with him. This text is an edited version, based on several of those sessions.

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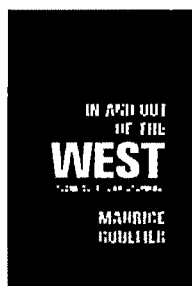
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Does anthropology really add to our understanding of foreign cultures or is it the continuation of imperial domination by other means? Situating the discipline in its historical context, Maurice Godelier argues that it has to some extent transcended its origins in the West and, more particularly, the colonial era, to achieve a measure of scientific objectivity and validity.



VERSO

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IRAN

Few countries have remained so opaque to objective scrutiny, so resistant to coherent analysis, as Iran. Recurrently characterized as the most hostile of all Middle Eastern regimes to the West, the Islamic Republic has connived at the American invasion of Iraq and occupation of Afghanistan, helping to prop up puppet regimes of the US in Baghdad and Kabul. Regularly represented as little more than a clerical dictatorship, it has—uniquely in the regional Umma—held genuinely contested elections, and maintained a parliament where debate is not a façade and votes are unpredictable; yet prison—or much worse—awaits principled dissent. Widely held to be an obscurantist theocracy, it has transformed popular literacy and given more women higher education than any regime in the neighbourhood. Famous for its poetry in the past, since 1979 the country has produced one of the richest cinemas in the world, even while millions have been driven out of it by cultural repression. Today Iran is moving towards centre stage on the international scene, as the US prepares to tighten the economic noose around it, to preserve Israel's nuclear monopoly in the region; and the regime in Tehran, more domestically isolated and divided than in the past, confronts a mass opposition enraged by electoral fraud and eager for more comprehensive accommodation to the West. The conjunction of these two crises has unleashed a torrent of clichés and homilies in the Euro-American mediasphere. In this issue, we publish the first of a series of pieces on Iran, aiming at more informed and critical coverage of the country. In a strikingly original essay, James Buchan sets the current impasse of the regime in a cultural-historical perspective going back to the Constitutional Revolution of 1905. Many further questions remain open. Among those consistently glossed over or ignored in standard treatments of Iranian politics are the comparative economic and political records, in practice, of the Rafsanjani/Khatami and Ahmadinejad governments; the class composition of the Green bloc of 2009; the social basis of regime loyalism; the exact roles, respectively, of the Armed Forces and the Revolutionary Guards in the power structure of the country; the intellectual, regional or other grounds of factional divisions within the clergy; not to speak, of course, of the strategies and activities of the Western regimes bent on bringing Iran to heel as one more domesticated pawn of the 'international community'. NLR hopes to address these and other issues as the twin crisis unfolds.

JAMES BUCHAN

A BAZAARI BONAPARTE?

HEGEL SAYS IN his lectures that history must repeat itself to be intelligible.¹ Yes, rejoined Marx, in his most elegant piece of journalism, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), first as tragedy, and then as farce.² Marx saw the coup d'état of Prince Napoleon in 1851 as a comic re-enactment of Napoleon Bonaparte's seizure of power on the 18th Brumaire, Year VIII of the French revolutionary calendar (1799), mere historical play-acting in altered circumstances. What would Hegel and Marx have made of the June days in Iran? The victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the tenth election for the Iranian Presidency on 22 Khordad, or June 12, was for his supporters an instance of divine grace and for his rivals a vulgar fraud. For the student of Iranian history, June 12 falls into a pattern in which popular revolutions (1906 and 1979) are disrupted by a coup d'état and then another and then another. In place of Muhammed Ali Shah Qajar, we have Ali Khamenei, for the Cossack commander Liakhov there is Interior Minister Mahsouli, and for Reza there is Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a Persian Bonaparte in a car coat.

For Iranians of a religious cast of mind, the history of their country is the repeated disruption of God's will by conspirators, mercenaries, foreign capital, liberals and the BBC Persian Service. For those of a secular bent, the sure passage of the country towards enlightenment is broken up by unpredictable periods of darkness, like a train journey in mountainous country. In either case, the consequence is frustration in which the Guarded Realms of Iran are granted neither prosperity nor justice, nor the fame they deserve in the eye of God and the judgement of humanity.

Within this perplexing pattern, there is a fundamental conflict which, as you might expect in the land that gave the world Manichaeism, takes different shapes at different historical epochs. Despotism fights Constitutionalism,

Monarchy Parliament, Right Left, God the Devil, hard-liner reformer. The twelfth of June opens a new chapter. The long stalemate since the death in 1989 of the revolutionary pioneer Ruhollah Khomeini, in which the reformers could not reform and the hard-liners could not hard-line, is broken. Iranian Republicanism, or *jomhuriat*, is wounded and the clergy at daggers drawn. We enter a period of confusion, confrontation with the Western powers and messianic enthusiasm. Somewhere in the great salt deserts of Iran, there will soon be a nuclear explosion.

Crowns and constitutions

In 1905, Iran was an out-of-the-way place where European modernity was represented by a few horse-drawn kaleshkis, five miles of pilgrim railway which some rode in their shrouds, a bankrupt sugar factory, a polytechnic, a brigade of Cossacks and thirty million roubles in national debt to fund the Shah's household and his water-cures in France. A protest at the bastinadoing of two sugar merchants and objections to the construction of a Russian bank were transformed into a revolt against the Qajar autocracy, famine prices and the sale of concessions to shady European capital. The progressive clergy, shopkeepers, craftsmen and a few liberals and social democrats called for a 'house of justice' and then a *majlis* (parliament), *qanun* (rule of law), and even *mashrutch* (constitution). Tormented by gout and kidney stones, Shah Muzaffaruddin Qajar agreed to grant a constitution on August 5, 1906 and the Majlis convened two months later. In a land where surnames were still a few years in the future, the deputies advertised themselves by their crafts: Messrs Bookseller, Tailor's Foreman, Silkmercer, Wholesaler, Fletcher, Crystalseller, Grocer, Ricecooker, Middleman, Watchmaker.¹

Muzaffaruddin died that winter and his son, Mohammed Ali, objected to any limitation on the ancient prerogatives of the monarchy. On July 24, 1908, the commander of the Cossack Brigade, Vladimir Platonovich Liakhov, turned his cannon on the Majlis building in Tehran. By then, many of the clergy had come to distrust democratic government and the wild talk of liberty and equality. Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri, the most learned

¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, ed. Georg Lasson, Hamburg 1968, vol. 3, p. 712.

² *Surveys from Exile*, Harmondsworth 1973, p. 146.

³ *Habl ul-matn* (Calcutta), 1907, quoted in Ahmad Kasravi, *Tarikh-e mashruteyeh Iran*, Tehran 1384, p. 181.

and influential of the Tehran clergy, concluded that, until the Lord of Time—the twelfth Imam in direct descent from the Prophet through his daughter, Fatemeh—should emerge from his *incognito* and usher in the age of justice and the end of the world, an absolutist government that applied Islamic law was the least of all evils. For the anti-clerical historian Ahmad Kasravi, the Constitutional Revolution was premature. 'The mass of people', he wrote in the 1920s,

were wholly ignorant of what a Constitution is and what it entailed and took part in the insurrection merely to follow their leaders. In that case, there should have been at the outset of the movement people to guide and educate and teach everybody about popular government and national life, and progress as it is understood in Europe.⁴

The 'little despotism', as it was called, lasted just a year. A force of Constitutionalist tribesmen from the Bakhtiari gathered in Isfahan, defeated the royal army and reconvened the Majlis. Sheikh Fazlollah was hanged on June 30, 1909. But Constitutionalism gradually disintegrated and much of the clergy returned to the seminary or doffed their turbans. In 1921, a Cossack officer named Reza seized power, ejected the Qajars four years later and instituted a modernizing despotism. Foreigners responded according to national type: English ladies attended Reza's coronation in 1926 and designed the court uniforms from patterns at Kensington Palace; a German professor dug up an ancient Persian word, Pahlavi, to consecrate the parvenu dynasty; the Soviet orientalists at *Novy Vostok* labelled Reza a bourgeois revolutionist, anti-feudal and anti-imperial, who would create an industrial society ripe for proletarian revolution.

Reza duly introduced surnames, a uniform dress code, factories, a national bank and university, an insurance company and military conscription. He paid off the foreign debt and forced government officials to appear in public with their wives. He smashed the corporate character of Iranian society, murdered his associates or drove them to suicide, and alienated every class of men and women. Hemmed in by Soviet commercial policies, and hating British control of the oil industry in the south of the country, Reza was attracted to Weimar and then National Socialist Germany. He built a railway from north to south, paid for by a tax on his people's only luxuries, tea and sugar, and that was his undoing.

⁴ Kasravi, *Tarikh*, p. 273.

In 1941, needing the Trans-Iranian Railway to ship American bombers and trucks to the Red Army, the British and Soviets invaded Iran and sent Reza into exile. His son Mohammed Reza took his place but, before he could find his feet, there was a brief flowering of parliamentary government. Under the wing of the Red Army in northern Iran a popular front party, the Tudeh (or 'mass') gained in power and influence. In 1953, after a valetudinarian nobleman named Mussadiq as-Saltaneh nationalized the British-owned oil industry amid great popular excitement, bazaar thugs and the anti-communist clergy (liberally bribed by the British and Americans) staged a third coup d'état. Restored to his throne, Mohammed Reza dismantled representative government, suppressed the secular opposition and attempted to demolish the clergy as a political force by ordering the troublesome Khomeini into exile in 1964.

When the revolution came, in the bitter winter of 1978–79, the old constitutional slogans of independence and the rule of law merged with the mourning ceremonies of the Shia for the martyrs of the Prophet's family. The public listened spellbound to Khomeini on television, discoursing for five nights on the first six words of the Koran.⁵ Meanwhile student radicals occupied the US Embassy and the Islamic Republican Party, whose newspaper was edited and managed by a certain Mir Hossein Mousavi, proceeded to make fools of the liberals. In the new constitution drawn up by the theoreticians of the IRP, the representative government of 1906 was revived but hemmed in by appointed institutions, such as the Council of Guardians, designed to preserve clerical hegemony. The new constitution, approved by referendum on October 24, 1979, placed at the head of affairs (first of Iran, and then the world), as Regent until that joyous moment when the Lord of Time unveils himself to view, a seminary-trained jurist. This arrangement, so rich in possibilities for political and doctrinal conflict, nonetheless remained intact through thirty years of presidential, parliamentary and municipal elections. That changed on June 12, 2009.

An electoral coup

Even in Iran, where alone of the Muslim lands miracles not only occur but are on the increase, the results of the tenth presidential election are a prodigy. Khomeini's successor as supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali

⁵ Ruhollah Khomeini, *Tafsir-e sureye hamd*, Qom 1363.

Khamenei, saw in the ballot evidence of 'the special favour of the Lord of Time to the Iranian people and the System of the Islamic Republic'.⁶ In contrast, Ayatollah Hosein-Ali Montazeri, an old revolutionary living in retirement near Isfahan, said here were 'results no healthy reasoning faculty could possibly accept'.⁷ To have turned out 85 per cent of the electorate is one thing, but for almost all of the increased turn-out to vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is another. In one province, East Azarbaijan, which also happens to be the home province of Mir Hossein Mousavi, his main challenger, Ahmadinejad increased ten-fold his vote of 2005. In two provinces, Yazd and Mazanderan, more people voted than were on the electoral register, and in four other provinces the participation rate was 95 per cent. Iranians in possession of an identity card can vote where they like and Yazd is a fine town, with an interesting Zoroastrian community, a tradition of resist-died silk-weaving etc., but it takes several days to reach. Where, for example, the Majlis election of 1943 took six months to count, this presidential election had a satisfactory result in an hour.

In politics, what matters is what people think. Millions of Iranians believe that the Interior Ministry, under Sadeq Mahsouli, and the clerical leadership have disenfranchised them. It is as if the Iranian public were no more than torpid *rayots* ('livestock') of the Middle Ages, not a nation that pioneered representative government in Asia in 1906, overturned a well-armed despotism in 1979 and advanced in bounds in literacy and college education over the last generation. This is not the society of 1906 or even 1979, but an educated population, dwelling in immense cities, and steeped in its own history. The public knows that representative government is a force in Iran. It was the Majlis that prevented Lord Curzon establishing a personal protectorate in 1919, stood up to the Soviets in 1946, ousted the stingy Scottish managers of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in 1951 and reformed the one-sided divorce law in 1967.

A rigged election in Iran is scarcely a new phenomenon. The ninth presidential election of 2005, which brought Ahmadinejad, then Mayor of Tehran, to his first term, inspired no sort of confidence in Iranian mathematics. The questions this time are why the revolutionary establishment in Iran, known in Persian as the *nezam* or System, found it advisable to stage this slapdash little coup d'état in this particular year 1388 of the

⁶ 'Khutbeh-haye namaz-e jome'e tehran', 29 Khordad 1388, available at khamenei.ir.

⁷ 'Payyam-e ayatollah montazeri piramun-e nataeje entekhabat', 26 Khordad 1388, available at www.amontazeri.com.

Persian solar calendar, and what are its consequences for the life and prosperity of the Islamic Republic?

Contenders

Of the four hundred and seventy-five men and women who presented themselves as candidates for President, all but four were rejected by the Council of Guardians. Those were the incumbent, Ahmadinejad; a former commander of the Revolutionary Guards corps, Mohsen Rezaei; an elderly cleric and former speaker of the Majlis, Mehdi Karrubi; and a former prime minister living in retirement, Mir Hossein Mousavi. Of the challengers, only Mousavi was given much of a chance. A cousin of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, Mousavi descends from the same branch of the Prophet's family as Khomeini himself. He was bred up an architect and town planner. A disciple (with his wife, Zahra Rahnavard) of the Fanonist philosopher Ali Shariati, Mousavi came to power in that evil summer of 1981 when the first generation of Khomeini's associates were wiped out in bombings and assassinations by the ultra-leftist Mujahedin. There followed a nightmare of Terror in which not only the Mujahedin but the secular Left and Kurdish separatists were wiped out or driven into exile. Evin Prison became for a while a concentration camp, and as many as three thousand young people went to the gallows.

As prime minister during the Terror and the eight-year war with Baathist Iraq, Mousavi is remembered for a fair system of rationing food and petrol, and for his bad relations with Khamenei, then President. Soon after the ceasefire with the Baath in 1988, Mousavi resigned. Khomeini's death a little later robbed him of his principal support and established Khamenei as Leader or Regent. The prime minister's post was abolished, the Islamic Republican Party dissolved and Mousavi retired into private life. When, in the course of reconstruction after the war, the scattered remnants of the Islamic left joined with a frustrated younger generation to become the 'reformists' (*aslahtalaban*), Mousavi resisted pressure to stand for the Presidency in favour of a popular clergyman of the second rank, Mohammed Khatami.

'An insignificant child of the Revolution', as he describes himself, Mousavi's pious scowl and long-winded manner seemed no particular threat to the System or to its ambitions to develop a nuclear weapon. He

has said, for example to *Time* magazine the day before the election, that the use of Iranian nuclear energy for the making of weapons was 'negotiable'.⁸ Yet the Iranian project to enrich uranium is not under the control of the Iranian president. A penitent Terrorist may not be the best choice for the many young Iranians longing to end their isolation and for the exiles hoping to return. Anyway, forms of government in Iran that look antiquated tend to be long-lived. The Safavids lasted a century after they had succumbed to drink and harem politics, the Qajars long outlasted their vigour and their revenue and even the Pahlavis, hated as they were, occupied the Peacock Throne for fifty-four years. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic, with its mixture of parliamentary democracy and clerical dictatorship, has survived since 1979 with only small alterations, of which the most important was the abolition of the prime minister's office and the return of Mousavi to his architect's table and painter's easel.

In the ten days of campaigning, the reform-minded Mousavi and Karrubi concentrated less on their own policies than on the conduct of Ahmadinejad. Here was a man of doubtful truthfulness, superstitious, chaotic in his administrative work, and bucolic, even clownish, in his appearances on the diplomatic stage. Ahmadinejad countered with his twinkle, his workman's manners, his open-handedness with the state's money, his intimacy with the Lord of Time, his fund of folksy Molla Nasreddin stories, his Jew-baiting, and his humiliation of the Royal Navy in the Shatt al-Arab. In a series of television debates—a novelty for Iran—Ahmadinejad cast aspersions on his opponents' financial probity and insulted Zahra Rahnavard.

As the Mousavi campaign gathered strength, it adopted as its symbol the colour green. That was both wise and rash. It was wise, because green is the colour of the Prophet's family, and also rather becoming. It was rash because the command of the Revolutionary Guards corps has come to fear a revolution from below. Mousavist green evoked Georgian rose, Ukrainian orange and Kirghiz tulip. Since those were movements to throw off the desiccated remnants of Soviet rule, they did not appear to have much connexion with Iran which, to everybody's surprise including its own, had managed to eject the Red Army in 1946. On June 10, Yadollah Javani, the political director of the Guards, warned that a velvet revolution would not be tolerated. 'There are many indications that

⁸ Joe Klein and Nahid Siamdoust, 'The Man Who Could Beat Ahmadinejad', *Time*, 12 June 2009.

some extremist groups have in mind a "colour revolution", he said. 'Any attempt at a velvet revolution will be nipped in the bud.'⁹

A Democrat president in Washington often unsettles an authoritarian regime in Iran. John F. Kennedy in 1962 and Jimmy Carter in 1976 insisted on democratic reforms that were ultimately disastrous for Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. As Tocqueville said, a bad government is never more vulnerable than at the moment when it begins to reform itself.¹⁰ Revolutionary Iran relies for its public support on external threat, both political and doctrinal. Barack Obama, in offering his hand, slackened one of the three mainstays that keep the country in perpetual tension—the other two being the threat of attack from Israel and sectarian Sunnism, whether Saudi, Binladenite or Deobandi.

Presidential elections in the Islamic Republic take place in two rounds, a French practice that Khomeini and his advisers brought back in their hand luggage from Paris in 1979 like a box of nougat. Unless a single candidate polls 50 per cent and one vote in the first round, after a two-week interval there is a run-off between the two leaders. It does appear that the 62 per cent given Ahmadinejad with such suspicious haste on the morning of June 13 was arrived at precisely to prevent that eventuality. A second round, in which the *muj-e sabz* or 'green wave' might have turned into a tide and swept Ahmadinejad away, was best avoided. As so often, what appears to be a consequence is, in reality, a cause. Whatever the truth of the matter, Ahmadinejad is so fond of talking that we will soon all know.

The week that followed saw the revival in Iran of the crowd, a force not seen in Iranian politics since Khomeini's funeral in 1989. At least 34 young people are known to have been killed by the security forces. Many were killed in a pre-emptive attack on the dormitory quarter of Tehran University in the small hours of June 15 and later that day, when a crowd running into millions came under fire from a base of the armed component of the militia or *basij*, beneath Mohammed Reza's memorial to the monarchy at Azadi Square.

In approved Marxian fashion, the Mousavists adorned themselves with the symbols of the 1979 Revolution. As in the January days of that year, each night a howl of 'God is great' resounded from the rooftops and

⁹ *Sobh-e sadeq*, 18 Khordad 1388.

¹⁰ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, Book III, Ch. 4.

bounced off the mountains to the north. As in 1979, they cried 'Death to the Dictator!' (or 'Death to Dictatorship!') though this time the dictator was Khamenei, and the dictatorship the Leadership or Clerical Regency (*velayat-e faqih*). If the Mousavists' heads were full of 1979, 1953 and 1908, the System also succumbed to nostalgia. Ahmadinejad saw the unseen hand of Downing Street and tweaked the tail of the sleepy British Lion at his white brick-and-wisteria lair on Ferdowsi Avenue. What was new was the style of repression. The old *chomaqdaran* or club-wielders, who used to break up leftist or women's demonstrations at the turn of the 1980s, are now flanked by militiamen equipped with handsome motorbikes and automatic weapons. Several hundred oppositionists were arrested and on August 1, a large group was put on public trial. At the trial, Mohammed Ali Abtahi, an adviser to Karrubi, in prison pyjamas and stripped of his turban, confessed to having been mistaken in claiming that the election result was a fraud. He said that Khatami, Mousavi and the former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani had conspired beforehand to stage a velvet revolution. Nobody in Iran credits such prison confessions, which have been a feature of Iranian life since the Pahlavis, or responds with anything but sympathy. Abtahi's distressing performance was merely a warning to the named gentlemen that they, too, could soon be resident in Evin.

The crowds lacked leadership. Mousavi, his wife and his friends were not willing to expose their young supporters to bloodshed. They lacked a programme, only a constitutionalist question: *rai-e man ku*—where is my vote? They lacked organization, except as a coalition of small parties known only to connoisseurs of Persian politics, such as the Union of Campaigning Clergy and the Participation Front of Islamic Iran. Just as the 1905–6 Revolution discovered newspapers and telegrams, so the Mousavists had new-fangled electronic communications. Distributed denial-of-service attacks on the websites of Khamenei and the Guards were all very well, but they were no substitute for the direct action of 1905–6: the closing of the bazaar, mass asylum in the British legation, and a general migration of the constitutionalist clergy to Qom. Nor was there, as after the royal coup d'état of 1908, a reserve of constitutionalist forces in the tribes as when the Bakhtiari marched on Tehran and defeated the royal army. The Pahlavis smashed the tribes, as they smashed up everything in old Iran; and what Reza started the Revolutionary Guards completed when Khosrow Khan, chief of the nomadic Qashqai, was hanged in the market square of Firuzabad in October 1982.

Above all, the Mousavists failed to win over the traditional economy or bazaar. Though the bazaar is frustrated at Iran's economic mediocrity, and by Ahmadinejad's inflationist practices, it stayed open through June. There was none of that creeping industrial paralysis that was a feature not only of 1906 but of the autumn of 1978, when the Pahlavi regime could not collect its customs receipts or supply its mechanized brigades with motor spirit. Even an economy as chaotic and mismanaged as Iran's generates a revenue which, distributed to the Revolutionary Guards, regular forces, police, militia, nationalized industries, veterans of the Iraq war, servants of state, a large clerical establishment of mortmain endowments and seminaries, and subsidized food and gasoline, creates an army of Iranians with a material stake in things as they are. The excess of spending over revenue is financed by inflation, always the simplest way to tax working people, for it is a tax they cannot avoid paying. Standards of living, when expressed in per capita income, have not risen since the days of Mohammed Reza, but inequalities of wealth are much less in the eye than under the Pahlavis and there are powerful sumptuary codes. As long as the regime keeps out foreign competition, and enforces modest dress and conduct for men and women (*hijab*), it can count on the bazaar. The rank and file of the Guards, which may be no firmer than the Shah's army, was not tested on the boulevards.

The Twittering of the exiles became, by the third week of June, just the squeaking of little birds on a wire. At Friday prayers at Tehran University on June 19, Khamenei spoke *ex cathedra*, evoked the trials of the Shia patriarch, Imam Ali, and said that a fraud of one million votes was possible but not one of eleven million votes. He declared the matter closed and threatened punishment if protest continued. On June 29, the Council of Guardians ruled the election valid. On August 5, Ahmadinejad was sworn in as president.

After-effects

So what are the consequences? Mohammed Reza used to say that those who did not like his Great Civilization could go away. Since 1979, the chief remedy of the Islamic Republic for dealing with unruly subjects has been not so much repression as banishment. Each tremor in the regime has produced its wave of emigration. The monarchists, military families, *savakis*, Jews and Baha'is left in 1979. The liberals and left quit after the Terror of 1981. In the 1990s, when oil could be had for \$10 a

barrel, the economy stagnated and the currency collapsed, hundreds of thousands of young men drifted abroad as once to the oilfields of Baku and the coal mines of Krivoy Rog. The Mousavists will no doubt make a fourth wave of emigration.

Such a purification through exile has two hygienic effects. The first preserves an image of unity (*vahdat*) which is the pretension of Muslim politics as it is the principle of Muslim theology: the people are as indivisible as the Godhead. The second is to restrict the ambitions of the Iranian middle class, and preserve its small-bourgeois, religious and traditional character. A side effect has been to create an army of a million or more Iranian exiles in the United States, Canada, Britain, Germany and Sweden, all but a few of them prospering, and all but a few homesick to death. It is as if in Bel Air and South Kensington, they have lost the metaphysical privilege of Iranianness. Their numbers at home have been made up by refugees from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Yet what happened happened. The System's unexpected loss of nerve in the June days has undermined its prestige. Despite the array of unelected bodies surrounding the Majlis and the Presidency, the regime still could not secure its wishes without giving a strong impression of fraud and shooting several young women. An order which once dreamed of imposing Islamic government on Iraq (or at least on the Najaf seminary that Khomeini had so hated in his Iraqi exile in the 1960s and 70s) finds itself shaken to its core by a drab architect and unarmed crowds. A Revolution that promised to give law to the world and return Jerusalem to the Muslims has reverted to a pessimistic Shiism-in-one-country, barricaded behind walls of belief and social conduct which are constantly being breached.

In the case of Ayatollah Mohammed-Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi, a philosopher and mystic in Qom to whom both Ahmadinejad and his political circle, the Abadgaran, are much attached, this pessimism shades into defeatism. For Mesbah-Yazdi, Iran is under perpetual assault and not only in the military arena. 'In the economic sphere,' he once said,

this war takes the form of international conspiracies to prevent economic and scientific progress in the Muslim world. In politics, it is revealed in the actions of local mercenaries and traitors to sow political chaos and dissension between Muslims. But the most important theatre of war is

culture where for years the colonialists and bulhes have played multifarious tricks on the Muslims. Alas, we see signs of their victory in our country and even in our households.

In a speech in Mashad on July 19, he said those who wanted to declare the elections void were denying the very principle of clerical guidance.²²

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic functioned. Its representative character gave the Iranian public a sense that it had a share in government, which provided a cloak of popular legitimacy for Iran's power politics. In retrospect, it was the refusal of the Pahlavis to tolerate representative government that left them unable to deal with dissent. Reza abused and beat parliamentarians as he did his associates, and his exile after the Anglo-Soviet invasion of 1941 was welcomed principally because it permitted a revival of parliamentary government. In time his son, Mohammed Reza, who turned from the frightened young man of the war years to a sort of Montreux edition of his father, had nowhere to turn in 1976 except a discredited and unpopular single party, the Rastakhiz ('renaissance'). It is now impossible to imagine the elections for the eleventh presidential period generating any enthusiasm. As Khamenei looked down, during Friday prayers on June 19, at Ahmadinejad in the front row, smiling like a prize pupil, he must have wondered: How am I going to get rid of this lad in four years' time? Elections may well degenerate into a *bayat* or oath of allegiance of the kind Sheikh Fazlollah had in mind.

As well as its tragic view of history, and its promise of redemption, the Shia has been since the time of the Safavids the principal means of seizing and preserving state power in the Guarded Realms. Confronted with the dilemma of all scripture, which is written down in time but must legislate for eternity, the Iranian Shia allows those men that can master the gruelling seminary curriculum great latitude in making law. It is this latitude which allowed the Shia to import so many of the mental goods of the European nineteenth century, such as constitutionalism and freemasonry; the Third Worldism of the 1960s; and now the internet. Yet never in all Muslim history was there such an innovation as Khomeini's theories for seizing and holding power in the world. Looking back at Khomeini's lectures in Najaf in January and February 1970, now known as *Islamic Government: The Regency of the Jurist*, one is struck by how

²² 'Dar musire-defa'e hameh janebeh az islam', Ramadan 1425, available at www.mesbahyazdi.org; Mashad speech available at www.parlemannews.ir.

the argument proceeds not by authority (as in classical Muslim thought) but by assertion. It is as if Khomeini, in his long journeys through the outer reaches of Persian theosophy in the 1920s and the 1930s, had mastered those lost gnostic secrets that allowed him to speak with the voice of God.

These fantastic Persian theories have never had much appeal outside Iran. They are unthinkable as heresy in the lands of the Sunna, and all but unknown in the strongholds of the Shia in southern Iraq, southern Lebanon and India. When Khomeini was exiled by Mohammed Reza in 1964 and made his way to the shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf, he found himself ostracized by the senior Shia clergy.²² The most venerated of the Najaf divines of our times, Ayatollah Ali Sistani, an Iranian from the generation after Khomeini, is himself a constitutionalist of early twentieth-century character. His singular contribution to rescuing Iraq from civil war was his ruling in 2005 that the Shia vote in the parliamentary elections.

Even in Iran, the unity of the Khomeinist clergy has broken. Divines of great authority have been silenced or driven into retirement. The heroes of Khomeini's movement, who endured exile and Pahlavi prisons and the assassin's bullet in their pulpits, see themselves displaced by power-seekers and mountebanks. Montazeri, whom Khomeini once called 'the fruit of my life', has been confined to his house in Najafabad since 1997. In 2002, Ayatollah Jalaluddin Taheri, the leader of congregational prayers in Isfahan, withdrew from an intolerably corrupt public life, in words that breathe the true spirit of 1906: 'When I recall the promises and pledges of the early days of the revolution, I tremble like a willow over my faith. I see the sun of my life on its last rays, my flour sifted and my sieve hung back in its place. I am drenched in the sweat of shame.'²³ In early July, he issued a statement condemning the manipulation of the election. Thus, pious Iranians disgusted with the violence and compromises of Islamic government have ample alternative authority, or 'source of emulation' (*marja'*) as it is known.

Like the French Constitution of 1848, 'so cleverly made inviolable', as Marx put it, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic can 'like Achilles,

²² Hamid Rouhani, *Nehzat-e amam Khomeini*, Tehran 1381, vol. 2, p. 219 ff.

²³ *Nouruz*, 18 Tir 1381, available in English from BBC Monitoring, 10 July 2002.

be wounded at one point. Not in the heel, but in the head.’¹⁴ The role of Leader or Regent, created in 1979 for the hero Khomeini, is oversized for ordinary successors. The clerical kingmaker Hashemi Rafsanjani, who in 1989 manipulated the Council of Experts to elect Khamenei as Khomeini’s successor, has long had second thoughts. At Friday prayers at Tehran University on July 17, Rafsanjani presented the events of June 12 as a betrayal of Khomeini’s legacy. ‘You are listening’, he said, ‘to a man who has lived each second of the revolution, from the very beginning of the struggle about sixty years ago until this day. I know what the Imam wanted and am thoroughly familiar with the Imam’s thinking.’¹⁵ Were Khamenei retired by the Council of Experts, which Hashemi leads, the entire constitutional edifice of the Islamic Republic would be rattled to pieces.

Portents

Few ideologies last much beyond the generation that brought them to birth. The young people who were permitted to vote for the first time on June 12 were barely conscious of the Khatami government of 1997, let alone the death of Khomeini, the Sacred Defence against Iraq of the 1980s, the Revolution or the whisky years of Mohammed Reza. The lurid symbols of those periods evoke little response in their imaginations. The endless sermonizing about traitors and mercenaries and British conspiracies strike no echo. They never expected that freedom from foreign interference would mean isolation from the main stream of world affairs, and unemployment in a country starved of capital and brain. They do not fear a restoration of monarchy, or have a very clear idea what monarchy is. They want liberty, not in the sense of libertinism, but as what we would call privacy.

What they will get, as we all do, is diversion. In his *Natural History of Religion*, Hume provocatively divided religious sentiments into the fanatical and the superstitious. Khomeini, who appeared at times to be so absent from this transitory world as to be indifferent to phenomena, had no superstition about him and no tolerance of it. Those Iranians who swore blind they saw his face in the full moon of January 16, 1979 received short shrift. Ahmadinejad, a self-conscious man of the people,

¹⁴ *Surveys from Exile*, p. 160.

¹⁵ BBC Monitoring, 19 July 2009.

has a taste for Persian popular superstition; Shah Abbas himself kept the best horses in his stable saddled and bridled for the use of the Twelfth Imam. Ahmadinejad has fostered the cult of the well at Jamkaran, outside Qom, where, according to tradition, the Lord of Time appeared for an instant and where he is expected to return. In the eschatological ferment of these days, the System may well find in some greasy truck stop in Sistan or Fars that it has an old-fashioned Iranian prophet on its hands. It will have only itself to blame. If Khomeini and Reza had nothing else in common, they did have this: There will be no prophets in Iran while I am breathing.

The other diversion is a nuclear weapon. There is a fantastic belief across Iran that a nuclear bomb will entrench rule by the turban for ever. It matters not at all that the capacity to detonate a nuclear bomb did nothing to preserve apartheid South Africa or the military government in Pakistan. The enrichment of uranium towards an eventual bomb explosive proceeds. If that frightens the Europeans or provokes an attack by Israel, so much the better, for only thus will the unity of the people be guaranteed and skirt lengths stay on the ground. If the future is confrontation with the West, messianism, social conformity and a nuclear seminary, is it any wonder that so many Iranians in June marched from Enqelab to Azadi? Until then they can watch Ahmadinejad perform like Louis Napoleon in the closing paragraph of the *Eighteenth Brumaire*:

Driven on by the contradictory demands of his situation, he has to keep the eyes of the public fixed on himself by means of constant surprises, that is to say by performing a coup d'état in miniature every day. He thereby brings the whole bourgeois economy into confusion, violates everything that seemed inviolable in the Revolution, strips the halo from the state machine and makes the state both disgusting and ridiculous.¹⁶

¹⁶ *Surveys from Exile*, p. 248.

INTRODUCTION TO SARTRE

Philosophers have produced many famous autobiographies, but few have left any diaries, in their relative spontaneity and immediacy a riskier form of self-revelation than retrospective composition. The single great exception are the notebooks Jean-Paul Sartre kept for some nine months, after being called up in September 1939, running from the Phony War to the eve of the fall of France. He filled fifteen of these. Of them, only six have survived. Five, found in his papers, were published posthumously by Gallimard in 1983, and were translated into English by Verso in 1984. A sixth—by a fortunate accident chronologically the first—came to light in a cache bought by the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1991, of which we publish excerpts below. The torso that has escaped destruction, some 600 pages in all, is by any measure one of the most remarkable pieces of writing Sartre ever produced—all but unmatched in their intellectual vivacity, variety and pungency. Though not much more than a half century has elapsed since they were written, the loss of the other nine books recalls the gaps in what has come down to us of the literature of Antiquity more than any modern precedent. The notebooks range freely over philosophical, literary, historical, political and personal themes. With the recovery of the first, Sartre's intentions become clearer. In his diary, he was developing the concepts and concerns that would form *Being and Nothingness*, published in 1943 after his release as a prisoner-of-war, sketching ideas that take shape in his *Portrait of the Anti-Semite*; and—not least—beginning to test the instruments of existential analysis that would ultimately produce his portraits of Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Genet and Flaubert. But the notebooks were not just a quarry of private reflections for future reference. Sartre, who was reading Gide's and later Stendhal's *Journals*, makes plain that he intended eventually to publish them, as a work of the same kind—though, characteristically, he showed small interest in them after the War, in the careless indifference to his own writing he records in the excerpts below. The sum of the notebooks thus becomes a wonderfully spirited, unsentimental—indeed often caustic—literary self-portrait, against the background of the opening months of the war. In the missing notebooks, we know that Sartre analysed at length his relationship with France—perhaps the most intriguing single theme in all that has been lost. But in the first notebook, we have what could be taken as the pendant to it: a scintillating description, written with a mordant lyricism, of his passionate relationship to the period that had just come to an end, the inter-war years of his prime.

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

WAR DIARY

September–October 1939

*Marmoutier. Thursday 14 September.*¹ A curious connection between stoicism and optimism. It's already there in the Stoic of antiquity, who needed to believe the world is good. More of a psychological device than a theoretical connection. Another ruse to tranquilize oneself, another trap of inauthenticity. I set out for the army stoically, meaning that on the one hand I blocked out everything that made up my former life, and on the other hand accepted a future in which my own possibilities would no longer exist. 'Readied up', as they call it here. I was glad to be readied up, but didn't realize that the essence of this state implies a kind of admiring docility towards the military authorities in charge of me. By placing myself in their hands, I trusted them and ceased to be a 'man against'. This obviously came from the fact that I had freely tendered my resignation. I lost my critical spirit, and surprised myself in the first few days by being disagreeably affected when officers were criticized in front of me. Certainly the famous attitude of 'saying no' already implies doubt and reservation. Acceptance, on the contrary, leads to that admiration on principle which is everything I most detest.

Too concerned with being well adapted in myself, for myself, in other words not being despairing or cowardly, I've not known how to choose between 'saying yes' and 'saying no', I've not been concerned about the objective situation. Fortunately I found myself in contact with Corporal Paul, a Socialist and thus dissatisfied and confused. Not someone who says 'no', but someone who gets mad and bitter, is sometimes afraid of the senior officers and sometimes curses them. The result is that I've begun to see the real situation. The pitiful transport from Ceintrey to Marmoutier also opened my eyes: the army has remained in war what it

was in peace. Acceptance, then, should be dissociated from admiration. That is now done. What remains is to see the objective situation.

THE WORLD OF THE WAR

I have not seen the war, which seems impossible to grasp, but I have seen the world of the war. It's simply the militarized world. The meaning of things has changed. An inn is still there, it's still decked out and welcoming, but its welcome is empty; in other words this possibility self-destructs and becomes absurd. An inn welcomes people *in exchange for money* and evokes a bourgeois freedom, the freedom of money. But the world of war is a world without money and without freedom. This inn has been requisitioned by the Administration. Soldiers are staying in it, they don't pay and they don't stay there freely. For anyone who reads the word 'Commissariat' written on its front door, the inn evokes a new meaning: that of gratuitous compulsion. At the same time it has become a pure implement—in other words, whatever former luxury the object possessed, it has now been made to serve solely as a necessity. The pretty room designed to charm the traveller is simply a den for the soldiers occupying it. They sleep there, but on straw. The bed is removed or not touched. And so, long before a bomb destroys the man-made object, the human meaning of the object is already destroyed. In wartime we wander through an implement-world. Exactly as in the barracks. It's just that, since the pretty charms of things remain, the result is at each moment a kind of evanescent appeal of a world that has disappeared, a continual illusion.

Objects are not the same distance away in war as they are in peacetime. I felt this the other day at Arzwiller: there was a forest of oak trees on red rock some fifty metres from the road. We had lain down on the edge of the road, crushed by our rifles, our backpacks, our greatcoats, like upside-down mayflies. I would have liked—not to go into the wood, but to think that I could do so. But it was impossible to think such a thing, it lay outside my possibilities. Fifty metres was enough to put a place out

¹ Sartre was called up as a reservist on 2 September 1939, aged 34. Poor eyesight had marked him for the auxiliary at the time of his military service in 1929, when he had undergone basic meteorological training. With three fellow soldiers of his ill-equipped meteorological unit—Corporal Paul, Keller and Pieter—he reached the small town of Marmoutier, some 20 miles northwest of Strasbourg, on September 11. He wrote to Simone de Beauvoir that, waking on the train that morning in the grey light of dawn, surrounded by sleeping soldiers, he conceived the project of a diary on 'the world of the war'. On September 14 he bought a notebook in a local shop and began to write.

of reach. It was nothing but scenery. And so for me Marmoutier does not have surroundings, since I cannot get out of the town. This world of war has its heavy, serious roads, and then its scenery. By having ceased to be within my possibilities, these remote places lose their reality. The fellows here translate this by saying of a pleasant landscape or an agreeable village: 'I'll come back when it's peacetime.'

War is a form of socialism. It reduces man's individual property to nothing, and replaces it with collective property. My clothing, my bedding and my food no longer belong to me; I don't have a home any more. Everything I use belongs to the collective. And I cannot form an attachment to it precisely because it is the collective, as such, it is impersonal. For me, it is true, going off to war does not involve a suppression of my individual belongings, since I've never had any. I don't have a house, or furniture, or books, or knick-knacks. I eat in restaurants, I have clothes—just what is strictly necessary. But the war has lumbered me with a heap of implements that belong to the collective and which I just use—helmet, mask, belt, boots, rifle, etc. Here I am in socialism, whether I like it or not. And cured of socialism, if I needed to cure myself of it.

All these implement-objects refer to a primary meaning. In peacetime just as in war, a hammer is to strike in a nail, a nail is to hold down a roof, etc. But in peace, the final meaning is always the same: the protection of human life. The final meaning of these implements in wartime is destruction. This is clear enough for guns and rifles. But in the *world* of war, what is striking is that all these objects whose purpose was to protect people are still there, intact, yet their final meaning now is destruction. This inn, this hammer, this nail, this roof still serve to protect, but such protection is no longer the ultimate purpose. Protection itself is only for the sake of destruction. All this is not a logical argument, it's something that is felt on the objects, and is again one of the causes of the essential ambiguity of objects in wartime: objects of luxury that become pure implements while keeping their luxury aspect, objects of protection that continue to protect while acquiring a sinister and secret sense of destruction.

Saturday 16th. To rely on other people. I think I can say that this has never happened to me before; I would have been horrified. And now here I am calmly wondering whether Saarbrücken has been taken. Which means: I hope the High Command will have had the intelligence, and the front-line troops the courage, to take Saarbrücken. We are not far away from the idiocies of the rear: the old lady counting on 'our brave little soldiers' and rejoicing to know that she's defended.

From time to time I feel released from the care of bothering myself about other people (Wanda—Bianca)² as I've decided that I'm the one that is the most bothered (paying in my person), although nothing is less certain. And yet this is the secret of my present calmness.

What has most strongly influenced my present attitude (although I've forgotten it recently and replaced it with a kind of rather stupid vulgarization: to put up with the war as I would cholera) is a phrase of Guille's: 'Lots of people during the 1914 war were solely concerned to conduct themselves like men.' This formula satisfied me in so far as it replaced collective slogans with an obligation towards oneself. But Guille is a humanist, and applied to me the phrase loses its sense.³ It is certainly at the root of the thought I had on setting out, and which I still have: that the war would be an adventure to complete my destiny. 'I'll have known madness, passion, art and war,' I thought, in a rather puerile fashion. Noble experiences, or supposedly so. At other times I conceived of war as the essential test of a man's life, which I had to pass. Afterwards, if I managed to get through it: serenity. As always, the origin of this notion was my preconceived idea of the lives of great men, which included, as I saw it, a period of testing. And I counted a bit on the war to make up for the ease of my first literary successes, which (still in this preconceived representation) seemed to me from the start somewhat dubious. At all events, there was an idea of a man's destiny (taken from Guille's phrase, while forcing it into my meaning) mixed with that of a great man's destiny (patched together from old reading, i.e. not from the real lives of Stendhal or Balzac, but from the categories through which biographers see these lives). At all events, this idea of destiny is deeply anchored in me: I have a destiny. This helps me to view mystically everything that happens to me as necessary steps in a journey, which I have to turn to advantage. And though I repeat and sometimes believe that war brutalizes those involved, I can't stop myself from seeing it as a source of experience, and thus for myself of progress. For the idea of progress, as a complement to the idea of destiny, is also essential for me. It's what the Beaver calls my optimism.

Sunday 17th. Russia invades Poland. I learn this at five o'clock from Paul who also brings letters (the Beaver, Wanda). Real anxiety. I can accept the war only if I think we'll win. I realize how stupidly I persuaded

² Wanda was the young sister of Olga Kosakiewicz, who was a student of de Beauvoir at the Rouen lycée; Bianca Bienenfeld was another of de Beauvoir's students.

³ Pierre Guille was a fellow-student of Sartre's at the Ecole Normale Supérieure.

myself that it would be over in a year, and *without any changes*. My past life is stuck to me like a scab. I only accepted leaving it without regret through the hope that I would find it again, just as it was. Wanda's letter has unfrozen me. But I still think she won't wait for me right the way through. I shall be calm, however, if I can get her to go to Paris.⁴ I prefer her unfaithful than unhappy. In sum, a day of emotions. It's a long time since this has happened to me. To be precise, since last Monday, when I felt grim. The Beaver's letters are overwhelming. I have the impression that it's I who is in the better position. I reproach myself for not being able to suffer with her and for her. Every carefree moment feels as though it's been stolen from her. I shall never again think that I have got it so bad that I needn't concern myself with others.

Monday 18th. The mobilization posters are so old now that the wind and rain have torn them to shreds, and their drenched and yellowed fragments are floating in the village streams.

No weather balloons today. My three acolytes are bored. Pieter: 'God, what can I do?' and Keller, sitting beside me, hands on his thighs and elbows out: 'How bloody boring it is here.' A mild feeling of superiority, as I'm not bored at all. Also a sense of superiority over Gerassi,⁵ who, according to what the Beaver tells me, sees himself as a hero because he's going to start painting again. In short, a self-satisfaction that is not very agreeable.

Though I'm rather untidy personally, since mobilization I wash, shave, and brush my teeth scrupulously. This is in imitation of Stendhal, who shaved each day during the retreat from Moscow. My good will is great, but surreptitiously it latches on to models.

Started Gide's *Journals*.⁶ From August 1914. Comforting reading, in short. At first I'm overwhelmed, I read from August to September, September to October. So many days, each lived one at a time. I read his days of war through my days of war. And suddenly my number of days is up, and Gide still has four and a half years of war to live through. It's devastating. But little by little, communion with a spirit from 'my party'

⁴ Wanda was staying with her parents at L'Aigle in Normandy.

⁵ The painter Fernando Gerassi.

⁶ In the summer of 1939 the *Nouvelle revue française* had commissioned a review of Gide's *Journals* from Sartre, and an essay on Kafka.

gives me back a kind of intellectual lightness that I had completely lost since 1st September. And then always this reassuring scam: by identifying my war with his, as several episodes and reflections invite me to, I turn this uncertain and unknown, inchoate future into something that has already been lived and has an *after*. At once, I give this enormous world of the present in which I am vegetating a horizon of 'after', and already begin to glimpse the day when it will be seen from this 'post-war' point of view.

Gide's constant efforts to take upon himself the sufferings of the war, to focus his thoughts on them. Meditations in a vacuum, moreover, and deliberately so—for it would be a sin to draw any benefit from them, even an intellectual one. A state of religious communion. It was a duty for him to keep his thought obsessed by the war. My inverse duty—and too easy—is to keep my thinking awake. To think and not to meditate. As he was a civilian, he had the duty of communing with others. In my military uniform, I have a duty to think clearly. And permission to act alone. All very well, but how readily would I give myself that permission if I was at the front and not in Marmoutier? It's there, moreover, that there would be merit in taking advantage of it.

The phantom war. A war à la Kafka. I don't manage to feel it, it escapes me. The communiqués don't mention our losses. I've not seen any wounded. Sergeant Naudin spoke yesterday of men gassed, but others deny this. Some patchy information. The Germans are not on our territory, no bombardments of the rear. Localized military operations on a very narrow sector. What the war brings the soldiers of Marmoutier is a greater freedom towards their officers, in other words they are more like civilians. If I am to feel the war, I have to receive letters from the Beaver. She, the Beaver, is at war, rather than me. I imagine this impression is shared by many people. Perhaps it is the result of a possible tactic on the Germans' part: keep on the defensive in the West, finish their war in the East, and then come and offer us peace. Perhaps we shall suddenly know *real* war when their peace proposals have been rejected.

Greater optimism today about the Russian attitude. We'd like to hope that their entry into Poland is a precautionary measure or a tactic of blackmail *against* the Germans. Yesterday Corporal Paul said very decidedly: 'If the Russians come into the game, we'll no longer just have to accept any peace we can.'

Again the tribulations of a Stoic. When I left the Beaver, on 2 September, I set out for something harder and better than this calm mediocrity. Now I'm contaminated, rotten.

In sum, a specifically bourgeois attitude: I can take the war, but if I survive I want to go back to my pre-war life. Isn't that the attitude of the Munich crowd, who could have stood war but not the death of capitalism?

Tuesday September 19th. The impression of a phantom war among others. The sergeant-major, dreamily: 'It's a funny kind of war.' He reflects for a moment: 'A political war.'

There are people who found themselves too young for one war and too old for another (1870, 1914); I was too young for the last post-war and dread being too old for the next. Reading the pages of Gide's journal on Montherlant or Drieu, I strongly regret not having been their age in 1922.⁷ And immediately the memory returns of the little bar, l'Escadrille, that sums up that whole period for me, the 'post-war' which I knew only from hearsay, and which for me is still the golden age. In 194... I shall be too old to know the headiness of change, if anything changes; not that I've so many years behind me, but I have a life, I'm formed. The present renunciations and all these transformations I observe in myself take place inside this life. The Beaver, Wanda, Bianca, my novel, are my cardinal points. And even if I try to prepare myself for death, it's always within this life that I prepare. A post-war would not mean dying, i.e. vanishing like smoke in the midst of my life, leaving this life emptied of me. It would mean the contrary: I would continue to live while this life disappeared around me. At my age it is easier to accept one's death than the annihilation of one's life.

Stalin seems to have acted in agreement with Hitler.

Five o'clock. The radio screams in the neighbouring house, Hitler is going to speak. Writing my novel in the large classroom of the boys' school, I hear the 'Heil' of the German crowd. The Alsatian soldiers have hurried in to hear the Führer.

⁷ Henry de Montherlant: novelist and dramatist; Pierre Drieu la Rochelle: writer and essayist, supporter of Doriot's fascist Parti Populaire Français in the late 1930s. In 1922 Sartre was 17, Montherlant 27 and Drieu la Rochelle 29.

This whole era of my life as a young man and adult, which I thought would also include my life as an old man—and even go further, continuing long after me—is now trapped between two wars, already historical. It has had a beginning and an end. It seemed to me an absolute, something like the air I needed in order to live. Now I have a distance from it, I assess it and am astounded by its suddenly revealed relativity. I could live without it. It has fallen away from me like an old skin. Similarly, before I spent a year in Berlin,⁸ I was not able to judge Paris. Paris was the air of my time. And when I came back from Berlin, Paris was no more than one city among others. The one I preferred, of course, but which I judged from outside. The 'inter-war period' is already a *thing*. From this point of view, such movements as surrealism, pacifism, etc., instead of being new dawns, seem more like ideologies conditioned by their time and necessarily disappearing with it. They have lost their horizons. I imagine that, for any era, to be present means having horizons. To pass is to lose those horizons.

Wednesday September 20th. In the face of this military shambles, two conceptions of the war and the army. One, optimistic, which I tried to keep up in the first few days but which strikes me as very metaphysical: just as in physics, there would be a statistical order for large masses and an indeterminism at the molecular level. The other that I see as more true: everything is unforeseen and disordered. Victory is determined by chance. 'Everything convinces me more and more,' Gide wrote on 25 October 1916, 'that these questions of strategy that are surrounded by such mystery and whose solution is claimed to require highly specialized knowledge, are matters of ordinary common sense—which a straightforward, lucid, and ready mind is often more apt to solve than a number of old generals.'⁹ No civilian undertaking, even those that fail, would put up with this kind of disorder or slackness. No administration, even the most fossilized, is poisoned by such a bureaucracy. When I want to be impartial, I tell myself that we are undoubtedly in a second-rate division, and that basically, the advance on the Saar front seems to have been conducted methodically enough. But what do we know? It's impossible to decide on the basis of the three lines of the daily communiqué.

It's a strange military disarray that is the opposite of anarchy and comes from the fact that orders are conveyed with total rigidity, from the higher

⁸ The university year 1933–34.

⁹ *Journals of André Gide*, vol. 2, London 1948, p. 162.

officers to the corporals, via all the degrees of the hierarchy. The different ranks never work together: they interfere.

Gide, 1 June 1918: 'I sometimes think, with horror, that the victory which all our hearts wish France to have is that of the past over the future.'¹⁰

Thursday September 21st. *Schadenfreude* with which I greeted the disintegration of the French Communist Party.¹¹ Precisely because this party, without being something really good, was good enough to shame me. There was a time when I flirted with it. And another time when I frankly turned away from it, but with a certain sense of remorse. The bottom line was that I could only accept not being a Communist if I could be *further left* than Communism. My conversation with Bianca. She: 'After all, neither you nor I have the courage to be Communists.' That was where the shoe pinched, and I replied: 'Yes, but on the other hand the PCF isn't such that we *should* have that kind of courage.' The fact remains that, however legitimate it was in my own eyes not to have had that courage, all the same I didn't have it. And it seems to me, when I see the Party destroy and degrade itself, that the problem itself was groundless, that my courage had only ever been demanded by a semblance. But that is not true at all. Whatever the PCF has become, there was a time when I was asked to choose, and I opted against it. Besides, Communism is not Marxism.

Friday September 22nd. In the papers this morning, one of those turns of phrase the French are so good at: 'At the front, *strategic* waiting period'. (See the expressions used in 1914, quoted by Gide: the German army absorbed by France.) On the other hand, a speech by Daladier. I didn't hear it myself, but the secretaries all talk about it bad-temperedly. Apparently, he committed the cardinal sin of saying that the war would last a long time. 'I don't want to hear him', one said, 'every time I do, I get depressed'. And another: 'He's the original defeatist. We should throw him in prison'. They all harbour the obscure hope that the war will be over quickly. I have no such hope. I tried this morning to imagine a swift end to the war—in the way you might play with a loose tooth—but it did not excite me in the least. I hope for nothing, I expect nothing. The calm of a nightmare, with the war all around.

¹⁰ *Journals*, vol. 2, p. 232.

¹¹ The PCF had been in disarray since the German-Soviet pact, which its leadership had tried to justify. It did not change its position when the USSR entered Poland on 17 September. Five days later the French government dissolved the Party by decree.

Saturday September 23rd. The Beaver says that I believe I am immortal. Perhaps it is partly true. I don't envisage dying. But there is something else: I've always conceived my writings not as isolated productions but as organizing themselves into an *œuvre*. And this *œuvre* is contained within the limits of a human life. Better, in my distrust of old age I have always thought that the essential part would be written before I reach sixty. There was still this absurd but deep-rooted childish idea that I didn't see myself dying before seventy. This meant an empty sleeve of existence separating the end of my life from my death. In other words, my life has an end long before I actually die, just as it had a beginning long after my birth (partly because I have little in the way of childhood memories). The result for me was a conscious existence, complete and finite, almost circular, in which expectations were exactly matched by results, while formlessness lay on either side of my real life. For the essential thing is not to be immortal. The essential thing is that life should be completed.

It was at Ceintrey, the day when Paul's panic led me to believe that we were going up to the front the next day, that for the first time I envisaged death the way the majority of people do, as an event that soars up in the middle of life and puts a stop to it, without completing it. I explained this in chapter 13 of my novel, in relation to Lola.²³ But I felt it and accepted it, looking at the river from the Ceintrey bridge. What it meant was not the unthinkable annihilation of my consciousness, but the total meaninglessness of all my expectant waiting: looking forward to a more perfect relationship with Wanda, to writing better books, to composing an *œuvre*, etc. And at the same time—contrary to what Heidegger says—it did not make my consciousness more individual, but rather transformed it into a thing, since I felt that one could say: it has been.

All this is much easier to realize given that I am already 'dead to my life', since everything has been left behind. It is true that most of the time I think that my life has just been suspended. But at other moments I see it brought to a halt. In those instants I outlive my life. Death is felt and accepted in this perspective. It is only my relationship with the Beaver that escapes the absurdity of death because it is perfect, and at each moment is everything that it can be. I am not waiting for anything more from it than its indefinite continuation. To sum up, at this

²³ 'He thought of Lola: she was dead, and her life, like Mathieu's, had been no more than a time of waiting . . . "If I died today," thought Mathieu abruptly, "no one would ever know whether I was a wash-out, or whether I still had a chance of self-salvation."' (*The Age of Reason*, chapter 12 in the final text).

moment and from the perspective of immediate death, I can say that this is the only thing in my life that has *succeeded*. The rest is only on the way to success, to different degrees. This intuition of death was very brief and did not return. To grasp its essence, I have to believe in its threat, I have to be—rightly or wrongly—in a death-facing situation. Now all that has evaporated.

Sunday September 24th. The officer or non-commissioned officer who laughs with the men always slightly mingles an expression of laughter with one of disgust. The lips separate, but rather than stretching out completely, they droop a little in the middle. That way the laughter comes from somewhere outside him. The officer barely takes responsibility for it. But he has no illusions as to its value: the grimace of disgust is not directed towards men, its aim is to undermine the laughter.

Glassy-eyed expression: designed to annihilate the soldier being looked at, in his own eyes. He is in the officer's field of vision, but he is not seen.

Expression of sudden deafness: it hits the officer abruptly and isolates him immediately. The moment before he had been listening to the man, now he no longer hears him. This can be combined with the glassy-eyed expression.

Tiny, seismic twitches running up through the nape of the neck to the head of the officer and non-commissioned officer, designed to imitate unshakeable conviction. Used especially when talking to a soldier while looking him in the eye. They allow the gaze (which stays fixed) to detach itself slightly from the face, which ripples like a corn field, signifying after-thought.

The voice must be veiled, distant and neutral. Always give the impression of restraint.

By taking these small precautions, a non-commissioned officer can afford to joke with his troops. And the soldiers say: he is not arrogant.

The phantom war continues. At a café a soldier shrugs his shoulders when he hears a communiqué: 'They'll never get me to believe that. Things are happening'. Me: 'What things?' Him, vague, but still through and through the type of fellow who is never fooled: 'Negotiations . . . ! When I left I was told clearly: you will be mobilized for two or three months at most and then it will be over'. He adds, emphasizing the words: '*And without war*'. Then, worried and in a vaguely questioning tone: 'All the boys agree with me'. The public has become so used to official lies that the speeches

of Daladier and Chamberlain, affirming their 'unwavering resolve to etc. etc.', leave them cold. People wink and tell each other: 'They're saying that for the Americans. They're saying it for us, etc. etc.'

Tuesday September 26th. The general state of mind: that of the spectator who, with an air of disgust, watches two boxers beating each other black and blue, muttering: 'There's something fishy going on here'. Nobody takes official government statements seriously. Perhaps they're so used to the old slogans on the occult power of freemasonry that they consider everything visible—the forces deployed, military engagements, etc.—as a *mise-en-scène*, a décor that they try to see through, in order to discover the real action going on behind. A preoccupation amongst us all: not to be duped. . .

Wednesday September 27th. 'If you make war,' said Brice Parain, 'you accept it, so you are an accomplice.'³ That is not quite correct. First of all, one must distinguish between making war and being in the war. If I desert, if I hide, I may perhaps avoid *making* war. But it is impossible to avoid *being* in the war. That is something I can neither accept nor refuse, as if I had the freedom to reject: it is a modification of the world and of my being-in-the-world. War is not an adventure that happens to me, with regard to which I can behave in one fashion or another. War is a way of existing for the world, and for I who am in the world; my individual fate starts from here: in other words, war doesn't enter my fate like disease, marriage or death. On the contrary, my fate is born out of the war. It is not distinguished from others by the fact that it contains war and they do not: I am-for-war to the very extent that I am a man. There is no difference between 'being-man' and 'being-in-war'. This is to say that I can no more 'say no' to the war than to the human condition. It presents itself as a modification of my being-with-others, of my being-to die, etc. There is nothing I can do about it. If I was to desert, I still couldn't do anything.

What can be deceptive here is that men decide on the state of war. But if it is true that the state of war comes about through men, it is realized outside of them. The extreme variety of individual destinies in war entirely escapes the authors of the war. Just like the aspect of the world (of trees, the sky, houses), like the human freedom of men-in-war. For if it's impossible for anyone to reject his being-in-war, individual difference

³ See Brice Parain, *Retour à la France*, Paris 1936.

and freedom are rediscovered even in the manner of being-for-war. Each destiny is woven with a new material which is the war, but each is different from others, differently woven. What disappeared on 3 September was not just 'happiness' and 'peace', it was a world with its sky, its seasons, its fauna and flora; a different world appeared for each individual. The first characteristic of men in war is to survive a drowned world. Men in war are survivors from peace.

The question remains: does one have to *make* war? The first thing I wonder is whether every individual who is freely for war does not *make* it. The Beaver, when she writes to me, when she takes a position towards Bost or myself, when she 'refuses happiness', as B. says, or rather when she now sees happiness, as she writes to me, as no more than a privileged manner of hanging onto the world of peace, the Beaver makes war. Anyone who does not allow themselves to be tossed around in disarray and uncertainty, but takes up war in its human reality, *makes* war. Even the deserter. For deserters are certainly needed in a war, they have their role to play. And the more deliberate a deserter is about his action, the more he reinforces war and his own being-for-war. Any coherent and freely agreed behaviour towards war is 'making-war'. It is impossible to escape it. For the deserter in no way hopes to suppress war by his action; he limits himself to confirming it. From the moment he flees, he affirms it and is only concerned with the best way of acting towards it, i.e. of making it. From this point of view, I make war by having chosen, between desertion and submission, which best suits my individual war-time destiny. I am neither more nor less complicit with this world than is the deserter. It is just that it seemed to me that my interests and my individual goal would be better served if, being in war despite myself, I obeyed the mobilization order.

What I have just said, badly and at too great length, is that war is not simply the object of my thoughts, it is also their material. Through what I perceive, this table or this pipe, I think of war; the manner in which I think and perceive this table and this pipe is 'of war'—finally, the fashion in which this table and this pipe present themselves to me is one of war. And this is not just a matter of clear judgements and comprehensions: my pre-ontological comprehension, my most immediate being in relation to my most immediate possibilities, are of war. And yet I have a horror of war, but this horror about an existing war is itself a being-for-war, it is invested by war, it is an immobile and fixed state that in no

way aims at rejecting war but simply at apprehending it; and it is on this basis of horror that my present calm, happiness and joy develops.

Sunday 1st October. Hitler and Stalin's 'Peace Offensive' provokes some confusion. The majority of the soldiers I saw this morning wanted us to accept the offer. Some did so grumbling: 'You'll see, in two years it will start all over again!' Others were hopeful: 'If they offer something good . . .'

The husband of our landlady, a sapper, arrived 'direct' on his scooter. He is at the border, by a riverbank, with the Germans on the other side. They talk to each other from one bank to the other. He spoke to some German officers who told him: 'Hitler really messed up'. No gunshots; niceties, pleasantries. They received orders to blow up the bridges. So, on the appointed day, they stuff the arches full of dynamite, move back a kilometre and a half, and the bridge explodes. The following day they return to their first camp and find the German officers, who say to them, aghast: 'But what are you doing?'

Monday October 2nd. My mind is empty. Or rather, it is filled with lots of inconsequential daily activities. My novel—like a bureaucrat's task, patient and humdrum. Gide. Letters. No ideas, nor even an attempt to consider things closely. It's perhaps today that the war has seemed most *natural* to me: I was inside it and not surprised to be so. It's undoubtedly this lack of surprise that has blocked my thoughts. Nevertheless, a certain appetite to write in this notebook has stayed with me all day. I even bought two more notebooks of the same kind. But it was a scribbler's or collector's appetite. I had a puerile desire to possess four or five full notebooks, just as in my childhood I had wanted the whole collection of Buffalo Bill's adventures. Also, I was naively seduced by the thickness of Gide's diary. I wanted my own 'War Diary' to be just as thick. Because, naturally, I plan to publish it. Though to be honest, I remain quite undecided. For a start, I write openly about B. and Wanda; I can not imagine, as a result, that these notes could appear in their current form as long as my 'civil' life is what it is. Furthermore, they are very badly written. From time to time I take care to 'turn' a phrase, and at other times they fall flat. If I was going to deliver my diary up to the public, it would have to be corrected. But wouldn't this be a form of trickery? Isn't improving the syntax a betrayal of the very spirit of the diary?

In any case, the circumstances of this war and my posting force me to talk here solely of myself. All I know about this war I learn by hearsay.

Seen from the outside, this notebook is a diary of *nothing*. A man alone, separated from those closest to him, spends totally empty days in a little Alsace town. He has no idea when this exile will come to an end. There is obviously no subject there for any edifying reflections. If I were on the Maginot Line, things would be very different. I therefore see very little possibility of publishing them—for now, since things can change at any moment—unless one is interested in me, rather than the war. And, for the moment, no one is interested in me. So when I imagine the publication of these notes, it is at a much later date.

These jottings are exclusively about me, yet there is nothing intimate about them, and I do not consider them as such. Everything that happens to me, that I think, I immediately envisage sharing with the Beaver; an event has hardly even happened before I start recounting it. Everything I feel, I analyse for the other at the very moment I feel it; I think immediately of how I can put it to use in some way. If I wasn't keeping this diary, and if there was no military censorship, most of what I've written here would have gone into my letters—and I would have forgotten the rest straight away. I don't know anyone who is as public as me. When I think, most of the time it is with the idea of convincing someone in particular; when I reason, it is in a rhetorical mode, to persuade or refute. It is really only my sensations and the intimate taste of my body that are intimate for me, because they are incommunicable. It doesn't seem to me, then, that this notebook can be reproached in the way intimate diaries ordinarily are—that the author is hedging his bets between intimacy and publicity (intimate, as intimate as possible, but in order for everything then to be brought to light). Whatever the fate of these notes, whether they are published or not, I wrote them in a public spirit—and first of all, to show them to the Beaver.

I must also recognize that they are of no help to me. My thoughts should become clearer under my pen, but for the fifteen years I have been thinking, I have organized myself without recourse to a notebook. I think and express within myself, and remember without writing. So, most of the time, everything that I write down has already been thought and formulated in my head.

Besides, there is another ambiguity here as regards the intimate diary: must one think while writing, or write what one has thought? Thinking while writing, in other words clarifying and developing a theme, pen in hand: one risks forcing oneself, one becomes insincere. Writing what one has thought: then it is no longer an intimate diary, it no longer has

that organic *je ne sais quoi* that constitutes intimacy. To be honest, I can see only two uses for these notebooks: as mementos; or as presenting, next to the ideas, the history of those ideas.

Let's be fair: there is something else. These notes correspond to a preoccupation that came to me around July last year, which was the following: to treat myself—not out of any interest in myself, but because I am my immediate object—successively and simultaneously using various of the latest methods of investigation: psychoanalysis, phenomenological psychology, Marxist or marxisant sociology, in order to see what can be gained concretely from these methods. This at a time when I had made significant discoveries regarding my own pride. I was tempted to apply these methods to my being-in-war. But I see I have moved far from this plan. Tomorrow I will try to clarify my *situation* in relation to the war, in other words, the way I should envisage it starting from my civilian life.

Tuesday October 3rd. I am going to try to determine what influences have predisposed me to take my present attitude towards the war.

First of all, war formed part of my memories of childhood. In this respect, it seems bound up with the family. I saw it from and through my family, it struck me first of all as a family event. All the same, I did not experience it directly, as many people did: no one in my family went off to the front. My uncles were too old, my stepfather too sickly, and we did not have a lot of friends who went, because our circle was mainly made up of university professors of my grandfather's age. And then, having left for the provinces at the end of 1916, I didn't see wartime Paris, the alerts, bombing by the *Tauben* and 'Big Bertha'. Finally, far from the war having deprived me of my father and left me to my own resources, like so many others, it *gave* me a father, as it was in March or April 1915 that my mother re-married.⁴ Was there any identification between the 'seriousness' of the war and the 'seriousness' of my stepfather? The war always seemed to me like a darkening in the air of the time, a heavy and icy shadow, above all boring—terribly boring—that descended upon things. I don't know that my schoolmates and I spoke very much of the events.

⁴ Sartre is slightly mistaken about the dates: he was in Paris for the school year 1916–17, in the *cinquième* class of the Lycée Henri-IV, and his mother's remarriage was in April 1917, not in 1915. But he would not have experienced the *Tauben*, used early on in the war, nor the long-range 'Big Bertha' gun which shelled Paris in 1918, after he had moved to La Rochelle with his mother and stepfather.

I had a certain comic talent for mimicking the noble emotions that my grandfather, an actor himself, displayed. In Arcachon, in August 1914, I was proud of the suppleness with which I cut a path through the crowd to obtain the first of those mimeographed pages that were sold under the name of 'communiqués'. I am reconstructing a bit, but it seems to me that I believed that in this way I was performing my duty as a Frenchman and helping the *poilus*. A little later, in Paris, I wrote in a little leather-bound book that Mme Picard⁵ had given me, in which one was supposed to set down one's likes and dislikes, that my dearest desire was 'to be a soldier and avenge the dead'. I remember the scene with some shame: it was in Rue Le Goff, in the living-room-cum-study. Mme Picard had just brought me the book, and it was polite to fill in the questionnaire in her presence. I sat down at my grandfather's desk (I still see the writing pad, the green blotter stained with red ink), and I wrote while 'the ladies' were chatting, conscious of my duty, certain that I was going to be read and girding myself up for noble sentiments. When I had written my response, the ladies were ecstatic and I went from one to the other to receive congratulations and kisses.⁶

I also wrote, around the same time, a war novel in which the hero succeeded in taking the German Crown Prince prisoner, and giving him a beating in the midst of a circle of *poilus*. Finally, at Noirétable, I performed in a little heroic play composed by my grandfather in a charity performance to benefit the *poilus*; I was a young Alsatian pursued by the 'Boches' in his village, who ended up united with his father, a French soldier who belonged to a *chasseur* detachment and took back possession of the invaded village. I stretched out my arm at the moment of pathos, saying 'Farewell, farewell our dear Alsace' with so successful an air of melancholy that Monsieur Simon, the warden of Reims Cathedral, 'drew' me. My mother still has this watercolour.

The *sixième* class adopted a *poilu* and I was appointed treasurer. They handed me five-centime pieces that I put in a piggy-bank. One day the 'protégé' came to visit my grandfather. He was tall, with a moustache, shy and sad. I imagine that I spoke nicely to him and everyone was pleased. The class, however, for reasons I have forgotten, lost interest in its protégé towards the end of the year. A little money remained in the money-box, which I kept for myself. Thus it seems my first contact with

⁵ A friend of Sartre's mother.

⁶ Sartre recalls this scene again in *Words* but there it ends in humiliation, the ladies dismayed by his insincerity.

war was purely heroic; I neither saw nor felt anything real, I let myself be clothed in conventional ready-made sentiments that I quickly cast off. At bottom, I didn't give a damn. And the underlying reason for all these comedies is that I was living with grown-ups and adapted myself to their games. .

What was genuine in me at this time was a very particular and localized boredom: I loved reading the weekly stories by Arnould Galopin and others about young boys' adventures and their travels around the world. After the declaration of war in 1914, some of these publications disappeared (in particular, Buffalo Bill and Nick Carter, whose publisher was German), and the rest were now filled with the exploits of young Belgians or French from the Nord. These stories bored me beyond belief. Above all, I think, on account of their monotony; it was always a question of battles between Germans and French. All the exoticism that made the *Tour du monde en aéroplane* so poetic (India, the jungle, the Congo, the Andean *cordillera*) had disappeared: the multicoloured pictures of savages were replaced by the *feldgrau* uniform of the Germans, the scenery was unchangingly the muddy and fissured countryside of the Nord. These young heroes, too weak to capture Germans by themselves, were always reduced sooner or later to appealing to a French captain or senior officer. All these bien-pensant values, though I adopted them when I was in the company of grown-ups, bored me terribly without my admitting it. I believe that this was the starting-point of my disgust with war. For reading, at this time, was my dearest and most important activity. I spent almost the whole day reading. The proliferation of war stories offended me deeply, and if I made a start at writing a war novel myself, I imagine this was by way of an infuriated imitation, as when you end up using an expression that grates on you in someone else's mouth.

When we moved to La Rochelle, I underwent a big change in my moral ideas. To begin with, I came under the authority of my stepfather, whose morals had scarcely anything in common with those of my grandfather; and then I formed far more important relationships with boys my own age. Up till then such connections had been pursued under the benevolent protection of my parents. They were now directed against my parents. And what playmates: cynical, brutal, hoodlums, preoccupied above all with sexuality. I remember how one day we took Madame Picard's questionnaire-notebook and covered it with jokes and insults. I adopted the cynicism of my friends so they would see me in a good light, in the same way that I had previously adopted the lofty sentiments

of my family. I grew increasingly distant from the 'state of war', which only my stepfather was charged with embodying for me. This identification of the war with my stepfather was enough to make it definitively morose, boring and gloomy. The armistice caused me neither surprise nor delight. Sexual questions absorbed me far more at the time. On 11 November, while the 75 guns were firing on the beach, Pelletier initiated me on the ramparts into games beyond innocence.⁷ Remorse preoccupied me far more than the Peace in 1919.

We had to undergo several years of official speeches on our glorious dead and the duties incumbent on us. It became a cliché. We greeted these noble sentiments with disgust, having all been complicit with them at a certain point in time—myself, for example, in 1914–15. And since it was usually our teachers who undertook these sermons, for us they seemed in part the official exaltation of Graeco-Roman morality, in part the counsels of virtue our parents gave us. By 1920 I could imagine nothing more dead and embalmed than what the war represented for me.

To sum up, war for me had long been nothing more than a bouquet of grown-ups' values. It was confused with 'duty' and 'fatherland', words we abused around 1919–21, and under this aspect it became unreal. I refused to read Barbusse's *Under Fire*,⁸ even though it dealt with this subject from a completely different point of view; it was contaminated. I didn't read *Wooden Crosses* by Dorgelès, and couldn't finish *All Quiet on the Western Front*.⁹ I found it all insurmountably boring; as soon as I tried to cross the barrier of virtues I'd erected in front of the facts, I discovered those realities that I've always disliked: discipline, organized formations, and the muddy plains of the Nord. In short, the same reaction to war literature as to the children's books of 1914–18.

My first reaction against 'the war' was thus indistinguishable from my reaction against grown-ups' morality. It had nothing in common with the horror of those who had actually experienced the smallest episodes of it. And as those grown-ups who spoke about the war were, essentially, those who had fought in it, I very quickly acquired a horror of ex-soldiers. They irritated me because they claimed to have rights over me. It was a combination of boredom, duties, pretentious and

⁷ The '75' was a French rapid-fire field gun, invented in 1897, much used during the First World War, and still in service in 1939; Pelletier was a schoolfriend of Sartre's from La Rochelle lycée.

⁸ Henri Barbusse, *Le feu*, Paris 1916.

⁹ Roland Dorgelès, *Les croix de bois*, Paris 1919; the French translation of Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues* appeared in 1929.

oratorical virtues that I wanted to shake off. To escape from the war was to escape from this false virtue, exactly as one escapes from religion when one loses one's faith.

Around 1924 I became an anti-militarist. The influence of friends (Broussaudier, Guille, who said at the time: 'I'd rather be shot than join up').²⁰ An essential book was *Mars ou la guerre jugée*.²¹ This anti-militarism was never constructive, any more than my horror of war was a form of pacifism. I never envisaged getting involved in any kind of action for disarmament, or of making actual gestures of commitment (refusal of military service on grounds of conscientious objection, etc.). I repeated pacifist arguments like the rest: 'Nothing that victory can give is worth a human life'—or again: 'Suppose the Germans invaded. And what then?' but without much believing in them. Many of my friends were horrified at the idea of killing, but when they were not there, Nizan and I said to each other that our repugnance was not at killing but at being killed. In fact, what I learned in PMS and later in military service was how man is degraded by the Army.²² That was sincerely felt, and when I was at the Fort de Saint-Cyr it plunged me into despair. I did my military service in as negative a spirit as I could. And because of this, it has remained the saddest period of my life.

This increasingly led me to consider war from a moral point of view, and in this way to concern myself more with my personal attitude towards war and in a war. I no more thought about agitating against a possible war than I did about deserting. When Guille or Broussaudier envisaged desertion as a possible option I always answered, rather uncomfortably: 'I'm an auxiliary. So I've got a very good chance of getting through O.K. Whereas if I desert, my whole life would be screwed up.' I thus retreated to stoicism as the sole possible moral attitude and, to the extent that war lay within the horizon of my possibilities, latent stoicism in case of war was a constant virtual possibility of my being. For a long time I dressed this as Alain's 'refusal'. To be stoical and say no. But of course, when I projected this saying no into the future, it was the war of 1914 that I was saying no to. No to the reign of virtue, to brainwashing and degradation.

Naturally too, I was persuaded of the idea, born from examination of the 'great' war, that there is no such thing as a defensive war, because

²⁰ Sylvain Broussaudier: fellow-student at the Ecole Normale Supérieure.

²¹ Alain (Émile Chartier), *Mars ou la guerre jugée*, Paris 1921. Alain's point of departure was the horrific reality of the First World War, in which he had taken part.

²² PMS: 'Préparation militaire supérieure'—the basic training course at the ENS.

no single party is ever uniquely responsible—and this made rejection an easy option. At the same time, the state of destitution of Germany between 1924 and 1930, hardly frightening, encouraged me to believe that in a war France would be the aggressor. So it was all the easier to refuse, since to accept would mean complicity with aggression. But I never connected war with capitalist imperialism, first of all from distrust of Marxist constructions, then because I was under the influence of Alain, who saw war as passion rather than a play of interests. So I viewed it as a passing madness against which I would gird myself when it actually broke out, and not as the necessary culmination of a political and social evolution which I should try at every point to stop. This suited me all the better, because—for other reasons—I'd never wanted to get involved in politics, and have never voted. So a negative attitude all along the line.

I come to the year 38–39. At the time of the *Anschluss* and in May 38 (German pressure on Czechoslovakia), I was afraid. The reality of war was still veiled for me. I saw in it only a rupture in my life, a break in my writings and above all the bombing of Paris. I remember how in May I went for a walk across Paris with the Beaver, and sensed in all these smart buildings their skeletons of iron and wood, imagining twisted metal and charred beams. From that time, Paris has always struck me as 'fragile', especially after September, and I have gradually grown detached from it, beginning to love it in a disinterested fashion. Then came September. Worry in Rabat and Casablanca. Ominous wait at Marseille.²³ It was in Martigues that I seriously envisaged being wounded; we were sitting on the bank of a canal; the boats' sirens echoed disagreeably in our ears, it was drizzling. We discussed whether it was better to return home blinded or facially disfigured. From that moment on, up till August 1939, I lived in what we called an imaginary belief in war. In other words our projects, our imaginations, everything was organized in terms of war but deep down we were not committed, or only in imagination.

Returning to Paris, I found myself between the pro-Munich and anti-Munich crowds, and I must confess here that I never had the intellectual courage to be either one or the other. The pro-Munich types disgusted me because they were all bourgeois and cowards, fearful for their own skins, their capital or their capitalism. But the anti-Munich crowd struck me as terrifying, as they wanted war. I was not yet sufficiently accustomed to this idea of war to understand that one could want it. The

²³ Sartre had spent the summer of 1938 in Morocco, and returned to Paris in mid-September, as the Sudeten crisis was deepening.

problem for me had always been: can one put up with it, or should one reject it with all one's might (to the point of desertion or being shot). If I opted for stoical resignation, at least I would keep a sense of remorse. Besides, the situation remained unclear: after all, the Sudeten Germans were Germans and wanted to return to Germany; after all, the Czechs had not been faithful to their word;²⁴ after all, we were not ready.

And yet it was around this time that the state of war established itself in me in a lasting fashion. In September, alone with C. X.,²⁵ then afterwards with the Beaver, I grasped the reality of war and my freedom in face of it; I will explain what this was elsewhere. In any case, a slow process was under way in me, which made me sense my consciousness as being all the more free and absolute, the more my life became committed, contingent and enslaved; to the point of finally showing me my present life, to which I was so attached, which I had taken as my very being, as one experience among others—supported, maintained and superseded by my consciousness. During that year, there were numerous times when the perspective of war made us 'existential', the Beaver and me; especially one evening in March, after the annexation of the Czech republic, in the little restaurant on the Place des Victoires. Reading Heidegger, which I had started to do, greatly inclined me in this direction. At Easter, after the Italian invasion of Albania, one evening when we were coming down the mountain towards Nice, I understood, felt, and explained to the Beaver the primitive situation of being-in-war, almost unthinkable in its complexity: it was necessary to realize simultaneously 1) that one does not know what will become of oneself in the world (injury or death—or simply brutalization); 2) that one does not know what will become of the world around one (defeat—appearance of a new ideology—social upheavals). But since, in the end, change implies that something remains, and in this case the self and the world risk changing simultaneously, each in its own fashion, it is not possible to conceive this total and irrational mobility.

With the result that war, which I initially experienced as the mythical reign of conservative virtues, and then, in the course of my readings, as an inhuman and terrorized quaking of the guts, as something that was too hard for man and consequently diminished him, became on the contrary an anxiety that was very beneficial, by which one might

²⁴ Perhaps a reference to the guarantees that the new Czechoslovak state had given to its minority peoples after the First World War.

²⁵ Sartre had had a romantic involvement with Colette X a few months earlier.

better understand one's being-in-the-world. All my thoughts of this year, my triple life, my strange lightness and happiness, were governed by the war. It suddenly revealed itself as a modality of being-in-the-world, perhaps the most propitious one for feeling and understanding this. As was natural, I made a few timid efforts to accept it as a future event, contingent and provoked by human decisions, since it was so advantageous for me as a general situation of human reality. For example I explained to the Beaver that this war would not be, as in 1914, an idle war for which all the powers were responsible, but that this time there would really be something to defend, in other words my freedom as a writer against Nazi ideology. To which the Beaver replied: 'In your case, possibly. But what does the Cévennes shepherd have to defend? And can you accept this war for him?' Which was irrefutable.

These attempts, at bottom, were only designed to rid myself of my stoical refusal à la Chartier, because this refusal no longer seemed motivated by historical circumstances, yet it prevented me from living and understanding war as authenticity. Finally, to reject war is all very well, but it means falling into it with your eyes closed. Alain speaks in *Mars* of the military system, but not of war. So I found myself at a crossroads, between the stoical refusal that all my moral notions had taught me to desire, and authenticity—and I sought to rid myself of one for the benefit of the other. I believe I am beginning to understand now: the nature of war is to be hateful, and the men who unleash it are criminals. Besides, it is a historical accident, a contingency that is always avoidable. But once this contingency has *happened*, it becomes a privileged point of view for man to realize and understand his being-in-the-world (because this being-in-the-world comes *in danger*). Better still, it is man's being-in-the-world, it is human reality itself seen under the angle of fragility, of absurdity and despair, but, by that very token, put in relief. It is necessary therefore to live war without refusal, which does not mean that one does not hate it, since its nature is to be hateful. It has to be lived in this hatefulness, and with authenticity. In sum, the change in my views is this: I took war to be an inhuman disorder which cast itself on man; I now see that it is a hateful situation but an ordained and human situation, that it is one of the modes of man's being-in-the-world.

Ittenheim. Wednesday, 4th October 39. At six thirty in the evening we meet in the church square, with the clerical assistants. We wait for the truck that is supposed to drive us to Ittenheim. No truck. There's a coach parked in the square, but it is reserved for officers. A lieutenant passes.

'Are you expecting a truck?' He laughs, so absurd does this idea seem to him. 'Well, if it hasn't arrived by ten to seven you would do just as well to go to the south exit of Marmoutier, where you'll be sent on to Ittenheim on foot'. He leaves. Consternation amongst the clerical assistants and orderlies. Fury from Paul: 'They *have* to take us there by truck, I'm not moving from here'. Despondency from Pieter: 'I have a hernia, I can't walk 20 kilometres'. I was sick of them, all the more so for seeing long lines of *chasseur* infantrymen setting off in the half-light, having already done 35 kilometres of forced march during the day, and who would perfectly well manage the entire journey on foot. We were quite heavily laden, but I felt a certain joy at the prospect of the effort that lay ahead. This strange obligation: to make as much as possible of things, so as to feel the war as much as possible. Always slowed down, naturally, by my acolytes (you might think them the Assistant in Kafka's *Castle*) and perhaps happy to be slowed down.

Lieutenants Munot and Pénateau arrive, along with Captain Munier. We debate with the lieutenants, who send Corporal Courcy to see the Colonel. Meanwhile, Captain Munier says, sympathetically: 'You should just get into the officers' coach'. So, we get in from the rear, into a dark car, and pile into the back. Next to us, an ironic, cultivated voice: 'Hohol Someone's got the wrong address, I think'. It's a short, moustached lieutenant whose iron-rimmed glasses and piggish face I see later, by the light of an electric lamp. He's with two other lieutenants who mutter away, scandalized. One of them puts on an ironic concern: 'Unless we're the ones who have the wrong address?' Then a hard voice: 'This is the officer's car, isn't it?' Pieter explains to them that Captain Munier told us to get in. 'Captain who?', asks a myopic voice, 'Munier? Prunier? Oh yes, I see . . .' They resign themselves bitterly to our presence and one says to the rest, 'have you brought your masks at least?' Then: 'given we allow *men* (emphasized with an aristocratic disgust) to enter this car, I don't see why our orderlies shouldn't be allowed in too.'

At this point a captain enters, 'there's the nice profile of Biener', he says, laughing to one of the lieutenants. 'Captain', Pieter exclaims, always obsequious (even though he moans about the officers), 'there are places free at the front'. The captain, gruff but kindly: 'At the front? Why the front?' 'We went to the back so as not to bother you', Pieter explains. The captain, energetically: 'We are not at the Comédie Française here, there are neither stalls nor gallery.' Stiff laughter from the three lieutenants. Then Lieutenant Z appears, looking more and more like a fairy: 'Friends, there are spaces in the ID car'. Sighs of relief from the three lieutenants,

who rush towards the exit in a panic, fleeing from the men. I can certify that we did not smell. It made me think of those rich Americans who abandoned an entire New York avenue because a black family had settled in one of the apartment buildings. Pieter, beside himself with indignation: 'Really! What a bunch! I wanted to tell them: Lieutenant, in civilian life we may smell better than you.' He goes right to the back to spread himself out. I sit with my back to the driver, my feet on the folding seat opposite me. A long wait, then the coach drives off into the dark, bouncing along very slowly. Joy. We slowly overtake line after line of black shadows, the *chasseurs*. Here and there the red light of a cigarette; on the road behind us I see the blue headlights of seven or eight cars in single file. Lots of stops. During one of these, the headlights of one car beam onto the mica of the rear window the flickering shadow of a man walking; he gets bigger and bigger, becoming enormous.

At 9 o'clock we arrive in Ittenheim. We are billeted, along with three orderlies, in a barn loft, full of hay and with two big beds. We take the beds—two in each. Broken window-panes. A dog barks. The road is buzzing with the sounds of troops on the march, orders being shouted, laughter. From time to time a headlight, suddenly turned on, splashes across our window. Paul jumps up next to me, Pieter coughs, snuffles, clears his throat. Three or four times soldiers come in, turn on their pocket torch or shine its light on us, demanding we make space for them. We drive them away. Joy always tinged with this slightly ominous melancholy that accompanies every military move into lodgings. Everything is always so cold, so sad; will we be able to find *querencias* the next morning?²⁶ But delight in the change of scenery. I sleep well.

Thursday 5th. On the radio at the Hôtel du Boeuf d'Or, music from *Snow White*. Crackling, interference. But when the tune I know (and consider dull and banal) comes through, it is like a glow in my night, a promise that all this will come to an end and I will become human again. It lasted all of fifteen beats, then it was over.

Friday 6th October. I'm getting used to this notebook. In the first few days I wrote with gloves on.

Warrant-officer Courteaux, a slender good-looking lad with a severe face. As frightening as a praying mantis, since you can read in his features

²⁶ *Querencia*: bullfighting term for the area of the ring where the bull feels most at ease.

that he never reflects on himself. His views: 'All those who left for this war in the hope of coming back are not real men.' (But in front of me he said: 'I want to go to the front line, I'll come back; I slip through the bullets.') Another remark, when he went past a dead horse, which upset him: 'What a shame! It tears your heart. Men can be replaced, there are as many as you like. But a horse costs five thousand francs.' And along with this, sensitive and nervous as a woman. Worried about his relationships with other officers: ready for 'bother' at their least change of mood. Delicate health, always in a big muffler.

A trick foiled: if I lament the war, all this period-of-mobilization is lost. The only way of avoiding this intolerable (to me) thought of lost time is to see the war as a possibility of progress. And therefore seek to live it in its authenticity. My whole attitude would therefore be a defence, and this being-for-the-war invented for the needs of the cause. Which does not mean, however, that it's a wrong thought.

Headlights on the Brumath road in the night. They light up the sky at ground level. Strange auroras turning and frozen in the sky, luminous mists against which the trees are profiled like shadows, and that suddenly absorb them in their light. At the centre, close to the headlight, the automatic and sudden twists of the shining pencil, almost in panic. But on the dark road our lorry passes hundreds of artillery vehicles, stationary, their lights out and covered with branches. The branches scratch against the cover of the truck as it passes. We turn into a small wood. As the beam moves, the trunks turn white and far behind us the edge of the wood lights up. The undergrowth remains black as ink.

What I sometimes think: all I could still hope for from my life was happiness. The war brought me a renewal. It would be too much to expect me to give thanks.

Sunday 8th October. Paul is a socialist and anti-militarist. But he is also a civil servant. And the bureaucratic side of his nature comes together with the bureaucratic side of the army. His love of paperwork, lack of initiative and fear of responsibilities could be cause for mockery in civilian life, but here they become virtues. He too contributes to the corpse-like rigidity of orders; he enforces them out of fear, and with the greatest unintelligence possible. Thus, for all that he protests against the war and the army, he bears within him a willing obedience. Rather than following orders day

by day, as I do, he submits with foresight—but in a military manner. And here again this comes from a civilian character trait: timorous, pessimistic, unadventurous, he foresees every possible outcome for a family outing, a lunch, a walk. He takes precautions against a hostile universe. In the army this hostile universe is the troubling and capricious world of the superiors. He fears them like he would a bout of indigestion, or the administration of his lycée; in other words, like Idols. And this is precisely how they want to be treated. So that is why this anti-militarist becomes the straightest of corporals.

My dream last night: I had been given the mission of taming some dogs and had taken the belt of my camel-hair coat to use, like a riding crop. I myself found this weapon unusual, remembering that in my previous training sessions I had been stoutly equipped with a whip. I was not too afraid when I went in as I knew the dogs. The first fled for shelter into his corner, howling; I thought: 'That one has understood!' The second came towards me showing its teeth; the time before, he had been the worst. But I gave him a few blows on the nose with my belt and he lay down. At the same time, a strange impression that the only reason he was being so docile was that something was coming, which he was waiting for, and which would wrong-foot me—and what's more, I realized (or someone told me) that I had got it wrong, that I'd only hit him with the soft material end of the belt, instead of holding it by that end and hitting him with the iron buckle at the other. Discomfort. At that instant, an enormous angry beast, which I called a hyena but which seemed far more aggressive, came out of a barn and threw itself at me. I hurled my powerless weapon at its nose but it still came towards me, amidst the triumph of the ironical dogs. I was so afraid I woke up.

The interpretation I gave it, at the time: the tame dogs—not too frightening—represent the various ennuis of military life, which I've overcome. But the hyena that came bounding out, and which, obscurely, all the protagonists of my dream were waiting for, that was the real representation of the war: bombardments, massacres which I do not yet know, and which is going to overcome me. In sum, the symbolization of this thought: you think you're crafty because you haven't lost your equilibrium up till now. But this is just a joke war. Wait for the real thing and you'll die of fright. Thus, fear of not being able to keep up my attitude. Here too, despite Freud, I would see a dream of fear, not a dream of desire. And it is true that this fear exists in me, not unconscious but vague, blocked 1) by a sort of insouciance and self-confidence; 2) by the

fact that, most probably, I will never see a battlefield and will always be at some distance from the gunfire. The wrongly held belt symbolizes, in my opinion, my incompetence in military matters, the disarray that my acolytes laugh at. Yesterday Pieter looked at my kit and said, 'It's shameful'. No doubt there is some obscure idea of guilt: 'It's because I set about it so badly, because I'm so unregimented, that I can't take the real face of the war.' In fact, I now remember having felt angry with myself at the sight of the hyena: held by the right end, my belt would have been a good weapon against it—but as it was, the belt was just a useless plaything, and I was powerless to hold it by the right end.

Monday 9th October. The most disagreeable thing for me in this war is isolation without solitude. Since I can see that this is exactly the state of the worker in a factory, I conclude that it is a bourgeois repugnance on my part. To have a *querencia*, or to desire to have one on which to base my freedom—that's what remains in me of the bourgeois property-owning sentiment. I need to have a few square metres to be free, to be myself.

Tuesday 10th October. I think I'm unbearable towards my acolytes because I find it impossible to hold them in any esteem. An unending reaction of contempt. Moral pedantry: I believe I'm a bit afflicted with it. I'm going to try to be more agreeable. Fundamentally I can't forgive them for being bourgeois, like me. With workers I would have been melting with humility.

Friday 13th. Humility is something unknown to me, yet I recognize my faults without reservation, since I have no solidarity with myself over time. There is something private and comforting about humility—deep and alive at the same time—which comes from the fact that one *lives* one's self of yesterday. This guilty self is precisely also the self that sees the fault. Perhaps there is some sincerity and courage here, too, a kind of assumed continuity with oneself. But each moment of my life detaches itself from me like a dead leaf. It's not that I live in the moment, rather that I live in the future, because of my goal, which presupposes a completed life; because of this tenacious illusion of progressing that I've had since adolescence. Whenever people talk to me about things I've done, I think: I'm better than that now. If I'm reminded of a mistake the day before, I recognize it with good grace since I'm persuaded that I won't do that again. For one sole reason, at bottom, that between it and me

there is a certain thickness of time. I don't believe in the progress of man or mores—or at least I don't think about it—but I certainly do in my individual progress. It would be intolerable for me to think that I was less intelligent, less courageous, etc. than the day before, and each time someone suggests this, I am hurt and slightly put out. I speak thus of who I was without sympathy, almost without trying to understand him. I abandon him to others' laughter and laugh at him myself. I defend him only insofar as those who attack him find common features with me. So I always consider myself at the height of my life, as of today.

At the same time, and through this very recognition of my mistakes, I strip the man in me in order to place myself on the absolute terrain of the impartial spectator, the arbiter. This spectator is the transcendental, disembodied consciousness that regards 'its' man. When I judge myself, it is with the severity I would have put in judging someone else, except that I have already escaped. The very act of judging myself is a 'phenomenological reduction', which I accomplish with relish, since I can in this way, at little cost, place myself above the man in me. I almost look out for these opportunities. It has happened to me that, after being in the wrong in an argument, I willingly recognized this and was subsequently deeply surprised to find that my interlocutor, despite this admission, was still annoyed with me. I wanted to say to him: 'But look, that wasn't me; I'm no longer the same.'

This is certainly what makes my theory of freedom so self-evident to me, its being in fact a way of escaping oneself at any moment. I never feel remorse. Not at all in the fashion that certain hardened souls do, from a solidarity with themselves so bitterly desired—despite time—that they continue permanently to maintain what they once maintained, but rather from a disposition to 'drop' myself, to regard myself—in the past—with a cold contempt, without feeling my present self committed in the matter. I drop myself (inwardly) just as someone drops their accomplice. And if I assume responsibility for my actions before others—and this, at least, I'm sure that I always do—it is with the impression of generously paying for someone else. Today, for example, when I know that there's a war on, I make fun of the person I was who was unable to foresee this—who feared it without foreseeing it. And I make fun of him because, extending my present self into the past, I have the impression that this present self, who knows that war broke out on 3 September, always did know this. Which gives him a manifest superiority over that poor wrong-headed self of 2 September who still doubted it.

Tuesday 17th October. This morning at six o'clock I left my landlady's alone (Paul was on watch duty at the school). It was raining, a stubborn rain which was setting in. Sky completely grey. Smell of wood-smoke in the street, a smell I only remember from Berlin—and here. Impression of German autumn. Vague memories of autumn 1933 in Berlin. German autumn: grander, more severe, more deserted than our own. Bare trees with red branches in the midst of a slate-coloured countryside—more sentimental as well. German autumn is Potsdam. French autumn is Versailles.

Wednesday 18th October. The whole morning, heavy gunfire. From the Wissembourg direction, probably.

Impossible not to think of the German attack, which is certainly taking place at this moment. I feel myself tied to this world which they want to destroy. I realize that I belong to it. Impossible not to feel one's attachments. This world being destroyed, this world of peace, this is where I was a man; each partial destruction is to a degree my destruction.

Strange: one takes up arms to defend a certain world (the post-war French Republic with its rights and ideologies). Yet one knows that the very fact of taking up arms is quite sure to destroy this world. What is defended is already dead. I am here to defend my life of 1919–39. But the very fact that I am here means that it has slipped into the past. If we win, we shall have defended the world that we will make *afterwards*, a world we cannot even foresee. Thus the men of 1914 defended the Republic of 1920 against Imperial Germany. By taking up arms, they buried the Republic of 1870–1914 with their own hands.

Saturday October 21st. Character of the world of 1918–39: it presented itself as destructible. Destructible by revolution, or by war. (As against the happy stagnation of 1900.) But not only did it present itself as destructible, it demanded destructibility. That was one of its claims to glory and its poetry. It knew itself to be transitory and was happy to be provisional, it sought already to see itself from the standpoint by which it would be judged when it was dead and buried. It lacked belief in itself. It was haunted by the memory of the war of 1914 and the fear of the war of 1939. It permitted itself many things because it knew it was going to die. And I lived this fragility intensely. I knew, we all knew,

that it would disappear. Few people in the past, it seems to me, loved their time as much as I loved mine. I clung to it with all my strength. In 1921, walking on the Boulevards with Nizan, it was good form to admire our epoch: 'Neon signs, flash photography, low-slung cars'—those were magic words. Writing was chopped-up and fast. And I now see what this meant; it was a stupid effort at modernity (a century of speed, people said, wanting a language without syntax that matched the 120 kilometres an hour of our express trains). But we were naïve then, and in good faith: we set ourselves to love these lights and speeds with all our hearts. We discovered jazz, but like poor people; we didn't know how to dance. We heard it said that marvellous love affairs were possible to the sound of the banjo, but they weren't for us; we were too young, too poor and too ugly. Jazz for us had the cruel sexual beauty of the forbidden. We heard talk of the admirable non-conformism (or so we judged it) of our older brothers and sisters, but we had neither the boldness nor the time nor the grace for these.

All this famous post-war life was for us a fairyland out of reach, a dream. And yet it was this that gave its charm to every little corner of Paris. My whole life has been perfumed by a post-war that I glimpsed through the keyhole. And now this charming epoch is dead. Its whole magnificence: negroes, skyscrapers, snapshots, orgies, free and tragic love, banjos, etc. has become a cliché. But it left its mark on me. What I passionately loved until 1939, everywhere in Paris—in Ménilmontant, in Montmartre, in Montparnasse—was the era that had already passed. I saw my whole life in terms of it: a time lost, not by me, but by others that I tried to regain. Those who lived it to the full are still alive (the Surrealists, Michel Leiris, etc.),²⁷ then young people came, severe and lacking in grace (Petitjean, Maxence, etc.),²⁸ who permit themselves to be severe about this dead gaiety. But I—we—we are of the in-between generation. Too young for one post-war, too old for the other. Too young to have enjoyed that post-war, too old to be able to judge it with detachment and severity: after all, it was *our* post-war. I have remained marked by it. My whole life and all my writings reflect it and seek to resuscitate it. And so this world in which I lived for twenty years seemed to me all the more fragile because its most valuable grace is dead. It is dead twice over now.

²⁷ Armand Petitjean: contributor to the *Nouvelle revue française*, became a Vichyist under the Occupation; Jean-Pierre Maxence: critic for the weekly *Gringoire*.

I believe that I loved my time like others love their country, with the same exclusivity, the same chauvinism, the same partiality. And I despised other epochs with the blindness that they apply to despising other nations. And my time has been defeated.

I always thought that something, in 1920–25, was almost born: Lenin, Freud, Surrealism, revolutions, jazz, silent films. All this *could have* come together. And then each followed its sporadic destiny. Isolated, they could all be strangled. It is only in my memory that they made up a world.

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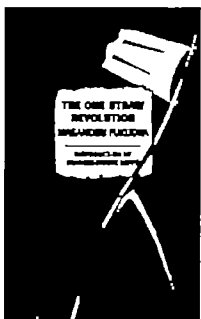
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TERRY EAGLETON

JAMESON AND FORM

THERE IS SURELY no doubt that Fredric Jameson is not only an eminent critic but a great one, fit to assume his place in a roll-call of illustrious names stretching from Edmund Wilson, Kenneth Burke, F. R. Leavis and Northrop Frye to I. A. Richards, William Empson and Paul de Man. Even this is to limit the judgement to Anglophone colleagues only, whereas the true field of comparison ranges much more widely. No literary scholar today can match Jameson's versatility, encyclopaedic erudition, imaginative brio or prodigious intellectual energy. In an age when literary criticism, like so much else, has suffered something of a downturn, with forlornly few outstanding figures in the field, Jameson looms like a holdover from a grander cultural epoch altogether, a refugee from the era of Shklovsky and Auerbach, Jakobson and Barthes, who is nonetheless absolutely contemporary.

To mention the name of Barthes, however, is to indicate one way in which Jameson has the edge over almost all of his *confrères*. For he is surely one of the most superb critical stylists in a largely styleless age. As Perry Anderson has put it, he is quite simply 'a great writer'.¹ Consider, for example, this breathtaking patch of prose from an essay entitled 'Towards a Libidinal Economy of Three Modern Painters', to be found in the author's recently published collection, *The Modernist Papers*. Jameson is examining what he calls the 'flat' in the paintings of De Kooning, by which he means 'stretches of painted colour across which the eye skids without so much as raising a ripple':

You have to imagine, I think, a process of effraction that seizes on the line itself, tangling it, as in the charcoal sketches, making it shiver and vibrate, shattering it rhythmically into pencil shadings, like so many overtones. Here some inner compulsion of line, some originary nervousness, makes it want to burst its two-dimensional limits and produce, out of its own inner substance, smears that co-opt and preempt its primal adversary, the brush-stroke itself. . . . In De Kooning, line transforms itself, it splays out, fanning

into distinct yet parallel ridges and streams of paint, refracting the original substance into strands that have different densities, some mountamous and bristling, others trickling down the canvas in tears that no longer seem the marks and traces of *maladresse*. Line is now brush-stroke and colour; its new structural opposite, the flat, is something that happens to the latter, rather than a place of freedom and of private, personal expression in its own right.¹

Some readers might find this overblown: too flamboyantly 'writerly' to have its eye genuinely on the visual object. My own sense is that, as with all Jameson's finest writing, these lines stay just this side of too portentous an awareness of their own brilliance, unfurling with all the mounting drama and excitement of the great Proustian period yet with something of its tact and finesse as well, if not exactly its air of naturalness or civilized lucidity. One feels, as one does not with Proust, that there is a turbulent linguistic energy at work here which might breed some disturbingly frenetic effects were it to let rip, rather as the De Kooning brush-stroke threatens to burst at the seams and spill its contents all about it. Indeed, I have suggested elsewhere that part of Jameson's perverse fascination with Wyndham Lewis—'the brutal and boring Wyndham Lewis', as Leavis aptly called him—may be that he detects in Lewis's flailing, agitated prose a kind of savage caricature or nightmarish version of what his own literary style might look like if it were to throw off all decorum.² In the passage I have just quoted, however, his prose is in sufficiently fine fettle to risk the odd touch of rhetorical inflation without fear of losing either its shapeliness or its momentum. If there is any inflation at work here, it is in the way language strives to project these smears and trickles of paint on to some broader screen of structural meaning, without detriment to their sensuous specificity. Deciphering the relations between daubs of paint is at one with interpreting the relations between certain conflicting forces and ideas.

We shall see later how this stylistic achievement, in which the sensible and intelligible constantly play into one another, is also in Jameson's view a solution to what he takes to be the central dilemma of modernism. Meanwhile, we can note that this is also a solution of sorts to the conflict between the postmodern culture Jameson feels we have at least to live

¹ Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, London 1998.

² Fredric Jameson, *The Modernist Papers*, London and New York 2007, pp. 256 and 257. Henceforth MP.

³ Eagleton, *Against the Grain*, London and New York 1986, p. 67.

with, and the high modernist art where a precious part of him is still at home. Modernism, he comments here, is still all about language, whereas postmodernism by and large displaces the sensory focus from the verbal to the visual. By writing in such unabashed high-modernist style about the painterly, then, the author of *Marxism and Form* and the dazzling film and architectural critic who was to emerge later are shown to be secretly at one.

Materiality and meaning

Yet if Jameson's style is resplendently unique and original, this must also mean on his own reckoning that it sails perilously close to a form of reification—for this is just how he regards the modernist cult of the individual style, of which he is himself a late inheritor. But whereas style in modernist writing can become a kind of fetish in its sealed-offness and false immediacy, as well as in the way it sucks the energies of the world into itself to become a kind of pseudo-animate thing in its own right, this is precisely not the case with Jameson's writing, which seeks in its dialectical way to bring sensory immediacy and conceptual reflection into intimate contact.

There is an extraordinary drama at work in the passage I have quoted above, as the De Kooning canvas is brought alive as a great war of antagonistic forces; and this drama is acted out in other terms in the sentences themselves, which as often with Jameson roll remorselessly on until, just at the moment when you feel they must surely have run out of breath and find themselves incapable of throwing off a single further sub-clause, they draw a last gasp and triumphantly snatch a few more pregnant utterances from their apparently inexhaustible depths. The passage also presents us with a literal version of the way that in Jameson himself ideas become materialized, as De Kooning's concepts thicken into streaks of paint and the tug and tension of ideas can be felt in the fingertips. This interweaving of materiality and meaning is something that interests Jameson the cultural materialist a good deal, as well as being something that his own writing actually accomplishes. His style, poetic in texture but discursive in structure, thus becomes allegorical of its own preoccupations.

Jameson, then, reveals another unexpected affinity with Proust in his remarkable gift for endowing ideas with a sensuous body, translating

conceptual matters into visual, dramatic or corporeal terms. He is not very interested in rigorous logical analysis—it works on both too abstract and too humdrum a scale for his epic turn of mind. There is an addictive quality about the Jamesonian style, as his sentences no sooner use up one clause than they reach restlessly for another. It is part of the perverse allure of his writing that it has trouble in knowing where to stop. One suspects that part of the appeal of Marxism for him, psychologically speaking, is that totality—standing in, among other things, for what he sees as the lost absolute of modernism—is a limit at which even his gargantuan hunger for every species of experience must finally come to rest, a desire which in its Faustian way will be satisfied with nothing less. If the semantic density, rhetorical inflections and magisterial pitch of Jameson's prose are in general 'European', the heteroclitc contents of the writing, its excited openness to almost any kind of material, are more stereotypically American.

It is part of the reader's pleasure in Jameson's writing that his syntax seems always to maintain its poise, perpetually at risk though it is of collapsing under the hectic productivity of ideas it has to cope with. Form, in other words, retains its edge over content, though it is part of our relish of these great roller-coasters of sentences that it only just manages to do so. The reader, so to speak, hangs on to her hat as she is pulled up the slope of a lengthy sub-clause, then teeters precariously on its cusp for a second before plunging vertiginously down another bumpy piece of syntax, enjoying with a certain frisson of alarm the prospect that she might be derailed altogether, yet secure in the knowledge that she will be delivered to her destination in one piece. Jameson himself regards this effort to subdue an unwieldy mass of materials to coherent shape as a feature of modernism itself, writing as he does of its 'attempt to reabsorb and recontain contingency'—'in spite of itself, it always seeks to transform that scandalous and irreducible content back into some thing like meaning'.⁴ In this sense, too, his style is allegorical of the dilemmas with which it deals, and furnishes something like an implicit solution to them.

It would be hard to imagine Jameson writing an extended piece of straight political or economic analysis. What fascinates him, as a kind of phenomenologist of the mind, is the business of imaginatively reinventing ideas, as his prose lingers over their flavour and texture. Ideas in his

⁴ *MP*, p. 229.

writing come saturated in sensibility, and the sensibility in question is as distinctive as that of an outstanding poet or novelist. He is not, like George Steiner, a hedonist of the intellect: the truth value and practical force of ideas are by no means a matter of indifference to him. His strength, however, is less that he coins new concepts, though he has of course done so, than that he provides us with imaginative objective correlates for our knowledge. In Shelley's fine phrase about the task of the poet, he enables us to 'imagine what we know'. An example of this can be found in the final chapter of *Marxism and Form*, where he describes dialectical thought as

thought to the second power: an intensification of the normal thought processes such that a renewal of light washes over the object of their ~~exas-~~peration, as though in the midst of its immediate perplexities the mind had attempted by will-power, by fiat, to lift itself mightily up by its own bootstraps . . . This is indeed the most sensitive moment in the dialectical process: that in which an entire complex of thought is hoisted through a kind of inner leverage one floor higher, in which the mind, in a kind of ~~shifting~~ of gears, now finds itself willing to take what had been a question for an answer, standing outside its previous ~~exertions~~ in such a way that it reckons itself into the problem.⁵

Style as solution

One of the central motifs of *The Modernist Papers* is the rift between being and meaning, existence and signification, which the book rightly sees as characterizing modernism as a whole. Once upon a time, meanings were inherent in things like seeds in a pod; now, like Joyce's *Ulysses*, the world seems split between purely contingent pieces of matter and abstract but empty schemas. The Kantian synthesis, in short, has ceased to do its work. That usual suspect, the commodity, at once a fetishized bit of material and a purely immaterial form of exchange, can be discovered lurking at the root of this great schism. Though the book does not quite put it this way, it is as though capitalist society is a botched work of art, being 'bad' universality and 'bad' particularity together. The market is composed of both appetite and abstraction—of that which cannot rise above the brutally sensual and specific, and that which can tolerate no particle of matter in its make-up. One might claim that what allows Marx to reject this duality is the fact that he is both a Romantic humanist with a passion for the sensuous particular, and a child of the universalist Enlightenment.

⁵ *Marxism and Form*, Princeton 1971, pp. 307, 308.

In Jameson's view, the absolute which modernism can only ever glimpse out of the corner of its eye is precisely this vanished unity of form and content; though it might be just as plausible to claim that some modernist art seeks no such unity, but rather pure form. The Romantic symbol Jameson rightly regards as a discredited solution to this problem. As for literary realism, which in its Hegelian or Lukácsian version was also capable of discerning the intelligible within the sensible, grasping the typical in the individual, this particular fusion of the two domains Jameson sees with rare insight as being historically scuppered by (among other things) imperialism, as the life of the metropolitan nation is increasingly determined by forces which lie outside its cognitive sway, and which can thus no longer be totalized in classical realist style.

Jameson's own translation of concepts into material images is yet another way of reuniting the sensible and intelligible. Writing at its most supple, as Adorno also knew, rescues contingency for meaning without thereby crushing the life out of it. If it recruits the particular for the general, it does so in a way which allows it to put up some resistance. Moreover, it offers this return from alienation not just as image or epiphany but as practice and process, in the material toil and pleasure of writing itself. Writing here is an image of non-alienated labour; but it can also provide a foretaste of emancipation in so far as it is 'a figure for sheer activity and for production as such'.⁶ It is, so to speak, an image of the release of the productive forces, as Jameson's own style becomes allegorical of a future material abundance in its well-nigh inexhaustible profusion.

Embodiments

As such, style itself becomes political utopia. In the older, collective register of rhetoric, the body is already a signifier: physical sensation, Jameson argues, 'is secretly transparent, and always *means* something else'.⁷ He might have added that what the modern age knows as aesthetics arises as a last-ditch attempt to codify sensation in this way, in order to render it intelligible. As a kind of logic of the senses, it seeks for some rational order in sensory existence.⁸ Modernism then emerges from the ruins of this semiotic system, as perception ceases to signify according to certain shared conventions, and the body becomes accordingly opaque. The birth of 'style' is thus also the emergence of the privatized body, and both are

⁶ MP, p. 186.

⁷ MP, p. 229.

⁸ See Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Oxford 1990, Chapter 1.

in different ways reifications. One might then complete this narrative by proposing that writing, at least of the poetic, Jamesonian variety, is both sign and body together, and can thus figure as a transcendence of what Jameson sees as modernism's various false solutions to their divorce.

Roland Barthes remarks in *Writing Degree Zero* that literary style is a corporeal affair, plunging straight to the body's visceral depths; and Jameson also associates style with the body. Indeed, in an extraordinary vampiric metaphor, he speaks in some (frustratingly obscure) pages on Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, with its portrayal of the diseased body, of the way in which reading 'can drink the blood of the body as it were . . . and borrow the latter's concreteness in order to endow itself with density'.⁹ This, however, belongs with what Jameson sees as the monadic, narcissistic, self-absorbed body of the modern reader, withdrawn from the world like the modernist work of art to a certain private, contemplative distance. Yet just as style is public language as well as personal idiom, so Jameson prefers to regard the body less as some kind of sealed interior than as a metaphor for the spatial. He is therefore able to link it to other spatial systems such as geopolitical ones, which given their abstract status are intelligible rather than sensible. In *The Modernist Papers*, he does this above all in the case of Rimbaud, drawing a daring analogy between the 'fermentation' of a whole geopolitical system and that of the adolescent body. The body thus ceases to be one of the two poles of a divided world—the material, private or individual part, as opposed to the general and conceptual—and becomes instead a means of bridging that gap. As such, it resists what Jameson sees as the somatic reductiveness of modernism, with its ineffable fragments of sensation from which meaning has been expelled. Modernism presents a problem to which both body and style are solutions.

In the work of Michel Foucault, the body and its pleasures come to stand in for the category of the subject, to which Foucault has a particular aversion. Such a displacement is not quite the case with Jameson, who does not regard the subject as a form of self-incarceration; but his distaste for 'inwardness' is sometimes not far from Foucault's own. He, too, betrays a curious hostility to 'deep' subjectivity, even though he displays a fair amount of it himself. With a moral intensity untypical of this scourge of morality, not to speak of a dim echo of the Soviet aesthetics of the 1930s, he dismisses as 'pernicious' the whole modernist project of sealing off

⁹ MP, p. 62.

subjectivity 'from a now dead and inert objectivity: generating a whole new field in which a whole new literature of inwardness and introspection can flourish'.¹⁰ Elsewhere in *The Modernist Papers*, Jameson goes so far as to brand the whole problematic of subject and object as purely ideological, an odd position for one whose work so often invokes the concept of reification. The idea of the expressive subject, he considers, is already archaic by the time of Baudelaire.

Yet modernism is as much a flight from the subject as a wallowing in its depths, and there is a sense in which this, too, is acted out in Jameson's literary style. What is striking about his writing in this respect is the way it combines an intense dramatic and affective life with a curious kind of impersonality, even anonymity, in which these rhetorical turns and emotive gestures seem to belong to the writing itself rather than to any expressive subject standing behind it. That subject is as dead for Jameson as it is for Baudelaire, which may be part of what attracts him to a subject-free postmodernism. Yet he is not, like some postmodernism, ready to give up on 'affect', which gets separated from the subject and transferred instead to the language itself. One recalls T. S. Eliot's distinction between 'emotion'—the raw stuff at the root of the poem—and 'feeling': the purely textual qualities into which it is distilled. One is also reminded of Eliot's Bradleyan vision of a world swarming with sensations which do not, however, belong to anybody's consciousness in particular. There is, in other words, a kind of subjectless affectivity at work here, which allows the author to conduct a vicarious dramatic and emotional existence in his writing while remaining, in personal and psychological terms, largely concealed from view. One might claim that he is a modernist in so far as he deploys a high, uniquely individuating style, but that this style is among other things a mode of self-masking; and that he is a postmodernist because he is allured by the idea of being freed from the tyranny of deep subjectivity. What both commitments have in common is the prospect of an escape from the subject—either by camouflaging it or abolishing it.

Anonymous subjects

Jameson finds something of Eliot's idea of impersonality in Baudelaire, observing that 'as the putative "feeling" or "emotion" becomes slowly

¹⁰ MP, p. 241.

laid out in words and phrases, in verses and stanzas, it is transformed beyond all recognition, becomes lost to the older psychological lexicon'; 'as it becomes transmuted into a verbal text, it ceases to be psychological or affective in any sense of the word, and now exists as *something else*.'¹¹ One might detect a touch of both relief and unseemly haste in the sentence with which Jameson follows this remark: 'So with this mention we will now leave psychology behind us'. One suspects that it is not to be consigned to the ash can of history quite as summarily as that.

The problem is to reach beyond the fetishized style or art sentence of modernism without toppling over into some blank, postmodern anonymity. To put it in other terms (though not ones used by Jameson himself): the vivid sensory fragment or highly wrought style of modernism are resistances to reification—to a world of impersonal, determining forces—but they are also reifications in their own right. It is just this that Jameson registers so magnificently in his account of Conrad's fiction in *The Political Unconscious*—the fact that the subjective impressionism of the author's style is simply the other face of a kind of positivism, for which reality is fixed and inert. The role of the former is to provide a degree of utopian compensation for the degradations of the latter, coating a realm of dead, meaningless objects with a wash of surface glitter. This, then, is a false solution to a dilemma to which Jameson's style provides a true one, seeking as it does to be both affective and impersonal. Rarely has a form of critical writing been at once so obtrusive and inexpressive—so full of theatrical and emotive flourishes, yet giving so little of the subject away. It might be objected that this reticence belongs simply to the protocols of academic writing, with no more significance than that. What is different from the usual run of such writing, however, is the sense of a strongly subjective passion displaced into language itself. It is also the case, as we shall see later, that the writing subject rarely reveals itself in the form of personal judgements. There is little sense in Jameson's work, as there is in, say, Edward Said's, of a voice arguing a passionately felt personal case.

A fetishism of style must clearly be avoided; but so also must its opposite, a kind of automated writing which seems to have been cut entirely adrift from any subject and simply spins itself out in a void. This is how Jameson sees the language of *Ulysses*—as words which nobody is

¹¹ MP, p. 225.

speaking or thinking, but which in a kind of 'autistic textualization' exist simply as printed units on a page. It is no accident that Joyce's great novel is full of gossip and rumour, which are also utterances without a source. But there is also the kind of anonymous collective voice Jameson finds in Kafka's mouse people, witnesses who are 'objective without any lack of sympathy', who thus combine impersonality with affect, and whose anonymity is a communal affair rather than a depersonalized one.²²

There is, however, something of the 'bad' species of anonymity in Jameson himself, when his writing is at its least impressive. At its best, Jameson's style has the nimbleness of a heavyweight boxer who can carry his considerable bulk remarkably well. At its worst, there is a striking contrast between the sensitivity of the individual perceptions and the implacable, elephantine motion of the sentences themselves. There is a sense in which Jameson is imprisoned within his style as well as incarnate in it, incapable of breaking out of this stately but sometimes rather ponderous rhetorical posture to pen a snappy sentence, crack a joke, switch registers or strike a colloquial tone. His style lacks manoeuvrability. He would make an excellent novelist but a dreadful dramatist. If his writing is inexpressive in a positive sense, spurning the myth of giving voice to unmediated personal experience, it can be inexpressive in a more pejorative sense as well, as much a rhetorical straitjacket as a sinuous medium. We shall see later that, as a form of psychical defence, it may also be armature and carapace.

Amorality?

At one point in *The Modernist Papers*, Jameson records his belief that the categories in which he has been dealing (subjective and objective, psychoanalytic and social, and so on) are in any case artificial. This is rather like claiming that territorial wars have only a minor degree of reality since the planet itself acknowledges no frontiers. Even if such distinctions are theoretically idle, they are real enough. But they are not in fact theoretically idle, and cannot be conflated as blandly as Jameson imagines. Indeed, the claim itself can be read as a defensive gesture, part of his distaste for the whole phenomenon of subjectivity. The subject is not simply the other face of the object. As we have learnt from the work of Slavoj Žižek, it is rather that which disrupts the objective disposition

²² MP, pp. III-2.

of things, that which is lacking, askew, obtrusive, out of joint. It is the denial of this duality which is ideological, not the assertion of it.

Jameson's suspicion of the 'deep' individual subject of modernism goes hand in hand with his animus against morality. There is an unexpected reference to Vice in *The Modernist Papers*, but it turns out to be a misprint for Vico. Subjectivity, morality, the personal or interpersonal life: these in Jameson are neuralgic points, places where the emotional temperature of the prose is momentarily raised, and as such, one suspects, symptomatic of something at all costs to be avoided. No doubt this is one reason for his affection for some of the more impersonal products of postmodernism, despite his belief that such culture represents the late flowering of a political system he opposes. Since I have taken issue elsewhere with Jameson's aversion to the moral, I do not intend to rehearse that argument here.³ I want rather to suggest the relevance of this allergy to ethics to questions of form and style in his work. The point at stake is a question of critical practice, not of philosophical outlook. It can be claimed that form operates in Jameson's work among other things as a kind of psychical defence against the ethical, in the sense of emotional, psychological and behavioural content.

But the issue is not just whether Jameson should give the ethical more credence; it is rather that his refusal to do so results in an undue dismissal of the empirical or phenomenal appearance of the literary work. In quasi-structuralist fashion, the empirical presence of the work is too quickly bracketed. Reading the essays on Thomas Mann in *The Modernist Papers*, with their wonderfully innovative investigations of irony, allegory, mimesis, polyphony, genre, narrative structure and the like, one is struck by the realization that Jameson says very little about what the common reader, even the common leftist reader, will surely carry away from *The Magic Mountain* and *Doctor Faustus*. What has happened to the explicit content of these novels—to the motifs of sickness, suffering, love, evil, unreason, humanism, Eros, mortality, barbarism, sacrifice? Why does Jameson appear so loth to tackle these common-or-garden thematic head-on, telling us what he thinks about such momentous questions, where he stands, what judgements he himself would pass on the various pressing subjects that come up? Throughout *The Modernist Papers*, as well as elsewhere in his work, he has something of a cavalier way with

³ See Eagleton, *After Theory*, London 2003, p. 143n.

such matters, referring somewhat disdainfully to the standard interpretations of Kafka's fiction (roughly, Oedipality, bureaucracy and religion), and inclining as early as *The Political Unconscious* to write off with chin-leading provocation such notions as character, event, plot and narrative meaning as so many 'false problems'.¹⁴

Historicism's limits

Jameson's way around such phenomena is two-fold: it is to formalize on the one hand and historicize on the other. These two operations can then ideally be brought together in what Jameson, following the linguist Louis Hjelmslev, calls the 'content of the form'. If form itself can be revealed as secreting historical or ideological content—and to show how this comes about is perhaps Jameson's greatest achievement—then a passage can be opened from form or structure to history or politics which does not have to travel through 'content' understood in its moral, empirical or psychological sense. At its least commendable, this method results in something like the paradox which Jameson himself discerns in the poetry of Wallace Stevens: 'an astonishing linguistic richness on the one hand and an impoverishment or hollowness of content on the other'.¹⁵ It can also result less in historicizing content than in historicizing it away. It can involve a displacement or suppression of empirical content rather than a rewriting of it—a rewriting which would involve granting it more credence than Jameson is generally prepared to do. Like most Marxist historicists, he imagines that to return permanent features of the human condition, such as illness or mortality, to their historical contexts is always and everywhere the most illuminating move to make. But why should this be so? Would the legendary visitor from Alpha Centauri not be more struck by the fact that all human beings without exception must die, than by the fact that death for the ancient Romans is not what it is for modern-day Californians? Jameson has a characteristic coyness about whatever cannot be readily cast in structural, schematic, historical or impersonal terms. It is, perhaps, the left equivalent of the stout burgher's fear of personal feeling. Yet it is one of the few benefits of an era of political defeat for the left that the limits of the political, as well as its continuing vital relevance, can be more candidly acknowledged.

¹⁴ Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, London and New York 1981, p. 242.

¹⁵ *MP*, p. 208.

It would take too long to demonstrate in any detail that what Jameson calls his 'absolute historicism' is misconceived.¹⁶ A few brief headings will have to suffice. For one thing, any historicism must include at least one precept—'always historicize!'—which is axiomatic, and as such exempt from its own historicizing injunction. No historicism can therefore be absolute. In any case, if a supposedly absolute historicism is one which covers everything, does this include the laws of geometry? For another thing, historicism is by no means an inherently radical activity, as Jameson seems to suppose; from Burke to Oakeshott, much historicism has been politically on the right. It is the left-wing adversaries of these ideologues who have typically appealed to universal values against historically evolved ones. Not all those who place works of art in their historical context are radicals; not all antiradicals are formalists. The fundamental argument is not between those who historically contextualize and those who do not, but between mutually antagonistic readings of history itself—between, say, history as a narrative of unfolding enlightenment and history as a tale of struggle and scarcity.

There are many precious continuities in human history, along with many noxious transformations. Judging by the record to date, human beings seem to find being miserably exploited a somewhat objectionable state of affairs, a continuity that leftists should value rather than dismantle. Historicism is generally more alert to difference than to repetition, and so fails to make enough of such facts. Moreover, there are plenty of aspects of our material make-up or species-being which are relatively unchanging, and it belongs to any authentic materialism to acknowledge this fact. Historical materialists do not play gullibly into the hands of conservatives by accepting the fact that though, say, grief over another's death indeed takes a variety of historical forms, there are a great many factors which a mourning modern has in common with a lamenting ancient. The notion that there is something politically perilous in such a recognition—that it lets in by the back door the spectre of an invariable human nature—is simply a historicist bugbear or culturalist bogeyman.

Jameson's work is too quick to substitute historical explanation for both moral and political judgement, as though the two were mutually exclusive. Throughout *Ideologies of Theory*, for example, he is notably nervous of the truth claims involved in such judgements, and at one point even

¹⁶ MP, p. xiii.

suggests that the categories of theoretical correctness and incorrectness should be abandoned for a concern with the pragmatic force and ideological function of an intellectual position. Would he really want to argue this of racism or fascism? He is, in short, historicist in all the ways Althusser abhorred, while anti-humanist in all the senses he admired. Writing in the same volume of competing versions of Gramsci's work, he dismisses as 'frivolous' the attempt to determine which interpretation is true, and even drapes the word 'true' in scare quotes in the manner of some cultural studies tyro. Elsewhere in the book, he suggests that there is no 'pregiven human body', as such, but rather a 'whole historical range of social experiences of the body'.¹⁷ But by what criteria do we decide that these are all experiences of a phenomenon called the body, rather than of something else?

Jameson's other habit is to formalize moral content out of existence, as he does in several of the chapters in *The Modernist Papers*. He does so, too, in his great essay on Conrad's *Lord Jim* in *The Political Unconscious*, in which he plucks a whole history of capitalist reification and rationalization from the novel's impressionistic style. Modernist artworks, which are sometimes rather poor in content, are thus peculiarly hospitable to his method, however negative he may feel about their ideological bearings. Indeed, they can become allegories of his own critical procedure, as when he writes of a tale by Kafka that it is 'not really to be grasped as an interpersonal drama' but as 'itself only a projection of the logical system'.¹⁸

Eloquent absences

This attention to the 'content of the form', as I have suggested already, is probably Jameson's signal contribution to criticism. The title of the book which first brought him to general attention, *Marxism and Form*, seems deliberately provocative and programmatic in this respect—a calculated semi-oxymoron, along the lines of, say, *Logical Positivism and Angst*, in the context of a Marxist criticism scarcely accustomed to treating artistic form with any great sensitivity. The notion of the content of the form is yet another way in which he can bring together meaning and materiality, as (for example) in the essay on three modern painters, in which

¹⁷ Jameson, *Ideologies of Theory*, pp. 652, 358, 344.

¹⁸ MP, pp. 103–4.

he treats Cézanne's use of ochre as a kind of ideology in its own right. Form—the sensuous organization of the work, the play of its signifiers or splay of its brush-strokes—has an abstract or conceptual lining known as historical content; and the two are as indissociable as sense and sensibility in Jameson's own literary style.

Yet rather as Jameson discerns a form of repression at the heart of a Cézanne canvas, so his own astonishingly adventurous re-writings of works of art in terms of form, structure and history, in which such works are estranged almost to the point of being unrecognizable, would seem based on a repression of the subjective, empirical and psychological, all of which needs to be rigorously, almost contemptuously banished by this otherwise most generous, inclusive of thinkers. There is, for example, very little about sexuality in the *œuvre*.¹⁹ Jameson's criticism thus produces an object bracingly discontinuous with the familiar texts of liberal humanism; yet in doing so, this devout Hegelian risks abandoning his own characteristic injunction, which is not just to cancel or negate, but to preserve and negate at the same time. Modernism in particular brings out in Jameson a vehement strain of anti-humanism, and this from a devotee of Lukács who was never much affected by the Althusserians. Its hermetic, overheated human interiors are rejected with a symptomal intensity of affect, in a prose style which seems otherwise constructed to distance any too personal feeling.

It is largely because of Jameson's reticence about ethical or subjective existence that wisdom is not a term we would readily associate with him, as we would with Bloch, Benjamin and Adorno. It must be remembered, however, that repression is what allows us to speak—that blindness is often enough productive of insight. It is, among other things, Jameson's silences, blindspots and elisions which have allowed him to produce the most distinguished and original body of cultural analysis of our age. For us readers, at least, this is a small price to pay.

¹⁹ Though see the essay 'On the Sexual Production of Western Subjectivity' in *Ideologies of Theory*.

REVIEWS

Bill Emmott, *Rivals: How the Power Struggle between China, India and Japan will Shape Our Next Decade*

Allen Lane: London 2008, £20, hardback

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ACHIN VANAİK

MISCONCEIVING ASIA

The mass of recent literature on the 'rise of Asia' largely focuses on the implications of this development for the West. It rarely stops to consider the impact on inter-relations between the Asian states themselves. In *Rivals*, ex-*Economist* editor Bill Emmott attempts to correct this by examining the cases of China, India and Japan, and argues that the interaction between the three will decisively influence the shape of the coming world order. As he points out, their triple coexistence as major powers represents a historical novelty. In 1820, when China and India between them accounted for almost half of world output, Japan remained a relative backwater, its modernizing drive of the Meiji period lying decades in the future; by the 1930s, when Japan had become a full-fledged industrial and military power, China was impoverished and riven by warlordism, while India groaned under the British yoke. The headlong economic development of the PRC and steady growth in India over the past decades suggest that the two Asian giants will join Japan among the top five national economies in the world.

Yet this very process is creating 'disruptive transformations' that will profoundly alter the economies, societies and politics of the states in question, Emmott argues, potentially raising new tensions between the three. Rising prosperity has brought commensurate expansion of Chinese and Indian global ambitions. The coming years will see intensifying competition over

resources and markets, not least in the battle for Burmese oil and gas fields. In addition, Emmott sees an incipient arms race developing, in a region littered with potential flashpoints. As well as territorial disputes—over Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh in the case of China and India, and over the Senkaku and other islands in the case of China and Japan—there are further sources of tension in Tibet, Taiwan, the Korean peninsula, Pakistan and Kashmir, which the deteriorating world economic outlook will likely only heighten. Emmott proposes a ‘plausible pessimistic’ scenario: China’s bubble-prone economy enters a deep recession, accompanied by rising social protests; the CCP tightens its grip with increased recourse to nationalism, amplifying regional tensions through displays of truculence. With Japan too bolstering its military, Taiwan might become the cause of a ‘short, exploratory exchange of fire’ that could also draw in the US.

Emmott is no stranger to prognostication: in 2003 he published *20:21 Vision*, offering ‘Twentieth-Century Lessons for the Twenty-First Century’. His verdict then was that liberal capitalism under US hegemony would endure, despite the challenges to it that might arise. In *Rivals*, written as the world entered an economic downturn, he has changed tack somewhat: ‘the future does belong to Asia’, he nods at the outset. ‘Asia’ itself is a geographical rather than a political expression, of course. But Emmott suggests a ‘new Asia’ is now being created through the widening and deepening of trade and investment linkages. Japan’s post-2002 recovery has been based on exports to China, not the US. In a few years China, not the US, will be India’s main trading partner. Around half of all Asian merchandise exports go to other Asian countries, a level of integration comparable to that of the NAFTA economies. Today’s ‘Asian drama’ is ‘generating new wealth, ideas and confidence’—‘knitting Asia together into a single, vibrant market for goods, services and capital, one that stretches all the way from Tokyo to Tehran’. (More specifically, Emmott’s investment tips are for Indian infrastructure and manufacturing, Chinese consumer goods and Japanese services.)

Nevertheless it is ‘premature’, in his view, to see Asia as ‘a genuine region’. What divides it, especially politically, is at present more important than what unites it. The three great powers are ‘not naturally compatible’, and each will be manoeuvring to strengthen its position and further its long-term interests. ‘Asia is piled high with historical bitterness’ and flashpoints that ‘could readily ignite during the next decade’. The history of Europe teaches that the most dangerous moments in balance-of-power politics come at times of change. Fortunately, Emmott writes, the barriers to war are higher today—thanks, above all, to the United States’ ‘stabilizing role as a global military power’: ‘In Asia, where the United States is an outside power but with extensive military deployments inside the region, that role as an intervener of last resort is especially important.’

The subtitle of *Rivals* turns out to be misleading. Emmott's real subject-matter is not how India, China and Japan will shape the next decade, but how the US should be shaping them. His recommendations are predictable. Getting India and Japan to balance with America against China has been established US policy since at least 1998, when Clinton's five-star presidential visit set the American seal of approval on India's nuclear tests. Emmott is full of praise for the 2005 Bush–Singh agreement—in which Delhi's foreign and defence policy has been subordinated to Washington's in exchange for nuclear sweeteners—as the consummation of this process, likening it to Nixon's trip to China as a coup for US diplomacy. He welcomes signs of Indo-Japanese rapprochement, too. In October 2008 Tokyo and Delhi inked a declaration for a 'Strategic and Global Partnership', only the third such agreement that Japan has signed (the US and Australia being the other two). Washington should by all means encourage closer economic integration between Asian countries, Emmott argues, and should drop its insistence that 'America must always be at the table when topics such as trade are discussed'. But defence and security are another matter—there, 'it would make no sense for America to leave the room'. Just as 'America plays no part in the European Union but is a pivotal element in NATO', so a similar division of labour is required in Asia.

The central chapters on the three powers, seeking to assess the sources of economic strength and political stability in each, cover territory that will be familiar to any reader of the mainstream press. China: the key driver of growth has been record levels of investment, at 40 to 45 per cent of GDP; but this is now creating asset-price bubbles and investment over-supply, building up pressures for a possibly painful adjustment. Will the growing Chinese 'middle class' become a democratizing force? Unlikely, in Emmott's opinion. Barring a serious and protracted downturn, CCP rule will remain stable, strengthened by the institutionalization of inter-generational leadership change. But Deng's motto, 'Keep a cool head and maintain a low profile', will be increasingly difficult to maintain. China's presence on the Korean peninsula as well as in Southeast Asia, the Bay of Bengal, Indian Ocean and Pakistan—building a deep-water port at Gwadar, upgrading the Karakorum Highway—is said to be jangling nerves in Tokyo and Delhi. Japan: economically things have looked up after the 1990s' lost decade, thanks to the massive casualization of labour and deregulation of telecommunications, transport, energy, financial activities, etc. Despite the problem of an ageing population, Emmott remains optimistic since the long stagnation of the 90s has had the beneficial effect of reducing the prestige of functionaries at the Ministry of Finance and MITI. India: economically there is more to be done to demolish the 'permit raj', and inequality will have to rise more before India's situation 'improves'. But Emmott notes approvingly the broad stability in policy

whether the BJP or Congress is in office, with the result that 'for all the muddle, India has built up quite a momentum'. Above all he warmly endorses the Indo-US nuclear deal because of the strategic pay-off.

India is clearly the country Emmott knows least, and his chapter on it is distinctly unimpressive. He completely ignores the vast literature that has sought to give an in-depth, long-term analysis of India's growth, not least of its geography and periodization. His intellectual diet is apparent from the acknowledgements page, a roll-call of corporate honchos, official government spokespersons, senior editors and think-tank intellectuals, all of whom in varying degrees are supporters of neoliberalism and the pro-US Indian turn. Here, as for China and Japan, there is simply no social map of the country, nor any real sense of the contradictory dynamics that have driven their development over the past twenty years. 'The main problem in Asia is fear and suspicion of China', Emmott declares. This is patent nonsense. The China Question may pose the biggest conundrums for US strategy, but principal problems in most of Asia are health, illiteracy, hunger and mass unemployment. Whatever the internal social and political tribulations of advanced capitalist countries, they are of a qualitatively lower order to those facing China and India as a result of the 'uneven and combined' character of their development.

Ruling elites in the two countries have a better awareness of future social dangers than Emmott demonstrates. In China, vast inequalities have opened up between classes and regions, as well as the urban-rural divide. Some 200 million migrants have emptied the countryside of educated youth; the low-paid make up a rising proportion of the total workforce; there is a growing pressure for the capitalization of land to create larger, more competitive farms through the displacement of small peasants; this will have a disastrous social impact, eliminating land possession as the key safety net for the Chinese poor. The government has talked of building a 'harmonious society', but Chinese capitalism with a human face will not alter the dynamics that are causing these problems. China's highly bureaucratized form of capitalism creates an interlocking of private capital and business interests with the Party administration and higher-level officials. These strata of the rich and super-rich—plus a new middle-class layer, some 150-million strong, comprised of cadres, business people and professionals—provide the strongest support for the current capitalist direction and for maintaining one-party rule as the way to ensure longer-term stability (albeit with internal disagreements about how best to carry out a 'controlled democratization').

The ratio of inequality in India, though rising, is nowhere near that of China. But the depth and character of poverty is much worse: 77 per cent of the population earns less than 20 rupees a day, creating problems on a scale that India's rulers cannot ignore. A rural-employment guarantee scheme,

though all too often inadequately implemented, was seen by Congress leaders as a key factor in their 2009 re-election—a form of ‘compensatory neoliberalism’. India’s ruling-class coalition differs from China’s: it has a much weaker bureaucratic component and is more in thrall to private capital, domestic and foreign. It also has an agrarian bourgeoisie which, though losing ground to big capital in the industrial and service sectors, continues to exercise strong influence on state governments, not least through its electoral-mobilizing capacities in the countryside. The existence of an institutionalized parliamentary system means that the country’s numerous social upheavals do at times result in policy adjustments at the central and provincial levels. But the extraordinarily variegated character of Indian society also means that the targets of popular resistance are many; the electoral system acts as a safety valve, and the coordination and unification of such a diverse array of struggles remains an unrealized goal. The more centralized and authoritarian character of CCP rule in China means that social upheavals are less varied in their origin and more easily repressed. But perhaps the very fact that such protests have the potential to be more focused and centralized makes their implications more worrying for the Party leadership, as it struggles to cope with the global economic downturn and an uncertain future.

The *Economist* has not had a good crisis. Its bullet-point ‘Hayek for dummies’ mindset has proved incapable of any deeper re-assessment of the problems currently facing the capitalist order, and it continues to trot out the neoliberal nostrums of yesteryear. Emmott’s claim that globalized free-market capitalism will ‘lift billions’ out of their centuries-long squalor is empirically and theoretically untenable. The macro-economic programmes of the past twenty years have accentuated the crisis for hundreds of millions of ‘Asians’ in the countryside and in the continent’s ever-growing slums. The prosperity of the advanced countries remains out of reach. It makes more sense to anticipate a much higher degree of social instability in both countries than Emmott allows for.

At the geopolitical level, *Rivals* suffers from a major flaw in restricting its considerations to Japan, China and India, and avoiding any reckoning of Russia as a major Asian player. Yet Russia’s relations with India and China, as well as with Iran and the Central Asian republics, will crucially shape the Asia of the future. Since 2006 China has been Russia’s number one economic partner, and both recognize that the US’s Ballistic Missile Defense project is aimed at them. Emmott consistently euphemizes America’s use of force in the region. In addition to the 300,000 US troops deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the ‘advisers’ overseeing bombardments in Pakistan, the Pentagon has several hundred military bases in Asia, including 124 installations in Japan and 87 in South Korea. US security pacts with Japan, Taiwan and South Korea continue to circumscribe North Korean and

Chinese behaviour. America's massive geostrategic dominance is to be further reinforced through the Indo-US strategic alliance, aimed at China, and the beginnings of an 'Asian NATO'—the principal pillars of which are the US, India, Japan and Australia, with supplementary roles offered to Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam.

In its theoretical underpinnings, *Rivals* is essentially a straightforward marriage of neoliberal economic thinking with a Realist interpretation of international politics that justifies the role of the US as 'hegemonic stabilizer'. But Washington does not intervene merely to re-adjust power balances for the good of all, as Emmott implies, but strives to tilt the scales in its own favour. Maintaining 'hub-and-spokes' relations with the powers in the region, and preventing the emergence of any autonomous Russia–China–India bloc, has long been a central aspect of American strategy. But Emmott offers no evidence as to why this should be good for Asia. The 'rivals' have proved perfectly capable of conducting their own diplomacy regarding border disputes and competition for resources. It would seem eminently sensible for China and India to pursue access to Iranian oilfields, for example, independently of US–Israeli dictates. In fact, if there are mounting difficulties in West and Central Asia arising from more effective resistances to US ambitions in respect of Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran and Palestine, then this would create both the space and the incentive for a stronger triadic relationship to emerge between Russia, China and India. This obviously is not the kind of 'Asian resurgence' Emmott has in mind.

In 2005 a Pan-Asian Energy Grid was mooted by the then Indian Energy Minister, Mani Shankar Aiyar. Emmott makes no mention of this proposal, which aimed to bring together the continent's principal oil and gas producers—Iran, Russia, the central Asian republics—and consumers—India, China, Japan, South Korea—to undertake a massive infrastructural programme. The proposed pipelines would run east from Iran, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, and south from Siberia, to the Subcontinent, China and eastern Pacific. The key to its implementation lies in the willingness of four countries in particular, Russia, China, Iran and India, to push it through. All four have recognized its potential benefits—and its profound geopolitical implications: the Pan-Asian Energy Grid would seriously undercut America's hold over energy reserves in West Asia. Emmott would be relieved that, for the time being, all four have left it on the backburner. (Indeed in January 2006, not that long after the Bush–Singh agreement, of which Aiyar was known to be critical, there was a cabinet reshuffle in which he was demoted to head the Sports Ministry.)

The hegemonic stability thesis, mainstay of the Atlanticist realist tradition in international relations, justifies the existence of a dominant world power on the grounds of its providing an 'international public good'. Emmott's

book exemplifies this line of thought. In practice, the provision of international public goods such as the Grid are subordinated to the particular interests of the American imperium. Noam Chomsky once remarked that one reads magazines like *The Economist* and *Business Week* not so much to get a balanced and accurate understanding of what is going on and of what needs to be done, but to understand how dominant classes and their acolytes and servitors think, and what they want. The same can be said of *Rivals*.

ATHEISM IN CHRISTIANITY



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Shlomo Sand, *Matai ve'ech humtza ha'am hayehudi? [When and How Was the Jewish People Invented?]*

Resling: Tel Aviv 2008, 94 NIS, paperback

358 pp, 1005 8 500 00309 0

GABRIEL PITERBERG

CONVERTS TO COLONIZERS?

The foundational myths of the state of Israel rest on the notion that, throughout history, the Jews have been descended from a single ethno-biological core of Judean exiles who had been removed from their ancestral lands in the first two centuries CE. Shlomo Sand's *When and How Was the Jewish People Invented?* sets out to refute such claims of organic ethnic continuity, arguing that the idea that the Jews had been exiled across the Mediterranean world was a creation of the Christian Church—mass displacement as punishment and constant reminder of who is *Israel Veritas*—which was conveniently embraced by 19th-century Jewish scholars. Their narratives of a centuries-long *Galut*, 'exile', and by extension the Zionist project of 'returning' to reclaim ancient territories, are based on historical fictions.

Against these, Sand offers an alternative history in which the striking demographic growth of the Jews in the Hellenistic Mediterranean was the product not of mass exile, but of an energetic drive of proselytism and conversion that had begun under the Hasmonean Kingdom in the second century BCE and lasted till the fourth century CE. Conversions were also, Sand holds, the source of the large Jewish populations at the margins of the Hellenistic world—Arabia, North Africa and the area between the Black and Caspian Seas—as Judaizing currents met repression in Christian territories and fanned out into the largely pagan lands beyond. Sand offers a cautious endorsement to the thesis, earlier popularized by Arthur Koestler, that East European Jewry—what he and others call the Yiddish Nation—originated not from any eastward migration of 'German' Jews, themselves supposedly descended from pure Judean exiles, but from the Khazars, Jewish converts whose empire on the Volga–Don steppe disappears from the historical record

in the 13th century. This contention has far-reaching implications, for it is the Yiddish Nation that is in many ways the real foundation for the two largest and most vociferous Jewish communities of the past half-century—the Israeli and the American.

The genre of Sand's book might be termed the 'counter-hegemonic text'. He seeks to deconstruct Zionism's mythical past, to expose the oppressive present hidden behind the screen of ideological manipulation and deceit, and to offer a counter-interpretation and an alternative vision of the future. Like the better examples of the genre, it combines serious scholarly argumentation with an explicit political edge: for both political and moral reasons, Sand urges, Israel must become its citizens' state rather than one of and for the Jewish People. Based in Tel Aviv, where he teaches history, Sand was born in Austria in 1946, and spent the first two years of his life in a displaced persons camp near Munich—his parents were Polish Jewish Communists who had survived the Holocaust. He and his family arrived in Jaffa in 1948; in a 2004 interview, Sand commented: 'I wouldn't say that the bed was still warm, but it is by now obvious that that flat had been left, or that it had been forcefully left, by Palestinian refugees who most probably live in Gaza today'. After fighting in the 1967 war, he left the Moscow-oriented Israeli Communist Party and joined Matzpen (Compass), an anti-Zionist Marxist group. In the mid-70s he went to Paris, earning his PhD, on Georges Sorel and Marx, from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales. But though his formation and early publications focused on modern French intellectual history, in the past decade Sand has shifted to writing mostly on his own society, and on the nexus between culture, knowledge and politics.

He is no stranger to controversy and confrontation. In 1983 he took part in a heated exchange over Zeev Sternhell's *Ni droite, ni gauche: l'idéologie fasciste en France*, and later drew the ire of Claude Lanzmann with his 2002 book in Hebrew, *Film as History*, in which he not only passed scathing judgement on Lanzmann's *Shoah*, but also revealed that the film had been secretly funded by the Israeli government. *When and How Was the Jewish People Invented?* too has attracted agitated commentary, as well as gaining considerable commercial success: its Hebrew edition was on the bestseller list for several months, and the French translation has been through three editions, selling over 25,000 copies and winning the Aujourd'hui Award. Its appearance in English from Verso later this year is sure to stir further debate.

Sand opens by recounting a series of personal episodes of Jews and Palestinians whose lives intersected with his in one way or another. This serves as a conduit for the theme of 'implanted memory'—the collective narratives that are 'assimilated' by each member of a given society. He then provides an interpretative survey of the better-known literature on nationalism, ideology and identity, and on the role intellectuals—especially historians—have

played in the creation and dissemination of nationalism. This survey, taking in the work of Anthony Smith, Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Carlton Hayes and others, is neither original nor especially insightful, though it is not misguided. Its main significance lies in the fact that it announces from the outset the unexceptional comparability of the Jewish-Zionist-Israeli case. The substance of the book, however, comes in the four subsequent chapters, in which Sand deals with both historiography and history, in that order. Not content with deconstructing the modern historiography of the 'Jewish People' as ideological in nature, Sand also tries, on the basis of accounts available to him—given that this is not a primary study in pre-modern Jewish history—to provide a counter-history that would ground his counter-politics. On the whole he does both competently and convincingly, though there are, as we will see, significant omissions.

Sand's argument unfolds in four steps. First, he critically discusses the way in which the Jewish People, as a continuous, organic ethno-biological entity, was invented in a process that began in the middle of the 19th century. The focus here is on German Jewish historians, but also includes those to the east and west of the Germanic world. Sand correctly identifies the key turning point in the work of Heinrich Graetz, whose eleven-volume *History of the Jews* appeared between 1853 and 1875. (He also gives an interesting account of the public debate between Graetz and the Prussian historian Heinrich von Treitschke, who saw a demographic threat to German nationhood in Jewish immigration from the east—prompting a liberal intervention from the classicist Theodor Mommsen, who cautioned against ethnicized definitions of German identity.) Sand highlights the central role played in the construction of such historical accounts by the use of the Old Testament. Moving forward in time, he then relates how a younger generation of Israeli archaeologists, dispatched by the state to excavate the post-1967 Occupied Territories in order to confirm the biblical narrative, ironically ended up shattering claims for its veracity, raising doubts as to whether many of its signal events had actually occurred at all.

The second stage of Sand's argument involves demonstrating how the founding experience of the exile of the Jewish People from their ancestral land was invented by a Christian Church bent on proving the sins of its monotheist predecessors—and was then taken up by Jewish historians as one of the defining traits of a persecuted ethno-national group, whose wanderings would cease only with their 'return' to the homeland. Sand then tries to show that there was no policy or process of forced exiling of conquered communities in the ancient world. According to the numerous Jewish historians Sand cites, although the fall of the First Temple was accompanied by formidable repression, it did not result in mass deportation. The ensuing subjugation to Roman rule rather signified a loss of temporal power over

Judea, a concrete dispossession that was subsequently recast in broader, figurative terms as exile.

But if there was no mass deportation, how should the presence of large Jewish communities around the Hellenistic Mediterranean be explained? Observing that many of these existed even prior to the crushing of the Great Jewish Revolt, Sand argues that their subsequent dramatic expansion was above all the product of conversion rather than dispersion. The Judaizing drive peaked in the Hellenistic regions in the fourth century CE, after which Christianity began to prevail; but the proselytizing impetus continued, according to Sand, on the margins of that world thereafter. He discusses the Jewish kingdom of Himyar in what is today Yemen, and the spread of Judaism among the Phoenicians of Carthage and the Berbers; the latter, he suggests, may have been one of the main sources of the large Sephardic populations of North Africa and Moorish Spain.

His eventual focus, however, is the Khazar kingdom, which ruled the region between the Black and Caspian seas from around the 7th to the 12th or 13th century. There are almost no direct documentary sources from the Khazar kaganate itself. But from references in Arab chronicles and in works by medieval Jewish writers, it seems that the Khazar rulers and elite, at least, converted to Judaism during the 8th century; the most plausible motivation being that of preserving a certain geopolitical independence vis-à-vis Byzantium to the west and the Muslim caliphates to the south and east. After surveying the historical sources, Sand discusses the Khazars' fate in Zionist Israeli and other historiographies—Soviet works first and foremost—and puts forward the thesis that East European Jews are descended from remnants of the Khazar population who migrated westwards after the Mongol invasion. Though Sand cites the work of numerous historians who had arrived at the same conclusion, the empirical basis for this is rather slim, resting on a few place names and some loose temporal inferences: for example, Sand records that 'Khazaria collapsed some time before the first indications of the presence of Jews in Eastern Europe, and it is difficult not to connect the two.' Sand is right, however, to note the aversion of the Israeli historical establishment to studies of Khazaria and other convert kingdoms, especially after 1967: 'The conquest of the "City of David" had to be achieved by the direct descendants of the House of David—not, perish the thought, by the offspring of tough horsemen from the Volga–Don steppes, the deserts of southern Arabia, or the coast of North Africa.'

In a fourth and final stage, Sand leaps forward to the state of Israel, bringing together past and present. In the book's most overtly political chapter, he aims to show why the ethno-biological 'Nation' constructed by Zionist Israeli culture cannot form the basis of a secular and democratic republic, since its racist presuppositions militate against the emergence of a civic society

willing to share more or less equally the polity in which it dwells. The Jewish democratic state of Zionist pretensions is nothing but an oxymoron. Sand therefore calls for Israel to be transformed into a republic of its citizens, not simply in abstract terms but as a concrete political arrangement. This is tantamount to a call for the de-Zionization of the state. Sand's presentation here is somewhat convoluted, but the point is important nonetheless. He also makes an eloquent *exposé* of the scientific-racist trend in Zionist thought, in which, as part of the attempt to invent a Jewish people, a succession of thinkers embraced eugenicist notions of race that emerged in Europe at the end of the 19th century. Many will find this rather shocking.

How should we situate Sand's overall argument? In its methods and political agenda it displays the influence of Matzpen on the one hand, and what might loosely be termed a post-Canaanite perspective on the other. 'Canaanism'—a pejorative term applied by its opponents—refers to a cultural-political movement active in Palestine from the 1940s to the early 1950s, which saw its mission as the revival of a primordial, pre-monotheistic Hebrew nation; a programme founded on notions of linguistic and cultural unity transferred from European organic nationalism. Emerging from the right-wing Jabotinsky school of Zionism, Canaanism sought to take Zionism to its logical conclusion by proposing an irrevocable divorce from Judaism, which would result in a secularized, territorial Hebrew state.

While the political component of Canaanism was never a serious challenge to Zionism, its critique of the latter's master-narrative was subsequently taken up by figures to the left of the Zionist consensus such as Boas Evron, to whom Sand owes an important intellectual debt. This is evident not only in Sand's political conclusions, but also in his historical interpretation: for example, when Sand identifies the Yiddish-speaking Jews of Eastern Europe in the 19th century as a genuine, fully developed nation, his argument is clearly informed by Evron's *National Reckoning* (1988; published in English in 1995 as *Jewish State or Israeli Nation?*). It was in this work that Evron most systematically articulated the marriage between a Matzpen vantage-point and a sort of left-leaning Canaanism. Though he eschewed Canaanism's political programme and its organic nationalist sensibilities, Evron accepted its critique of Zionism, and its attendant political conclusion—that whatever has emerged in Palestine/Israel as a result of Zionist colonization is a territorial nation that is not, and cannot be, Jewish, but is rather Israeli. He called for the de-Judaization and de-Zionization of the state of Israel, for a fundamental separation between state and church and the transformation of the state into a republic of its citizens. The demand that a modern state be a normally territorial nation-state is, of course, not at all radical or dramatic, but in the context of Israeli and American Zionism, it is heresy.

In 2008, Sand was asked by a *Haaretz* interviewer why refutation of the myth of the Jewish People as ethno-biological collective generates such deep anxieties. Sand replied that 'since the beginning of the period of decolonization, settlers have no longer been able to say simply: "We came, we won and now we are here" the way the Americans, the whites in South Africa and the Australians said. There is a very deep fear that doubt will be cast on our right to exist'. Given his awareness that the Palestine/Israel story is one of settler colonialism, it is puzzling that Sand fails to grasp the connection between settler colonial projects and modern nationalism. It represents a major oversight, given the subject of his book and his desire to change the state that is founded on the myths he describes.

This is apparent in his initial survey of the literature on nationalism, in which he does not engage with the scholarship on comparative settler colonialism. He dismisses Benedict Anderson's thesis that nationalism first appeared among the Creole colonies in the Americas because, for Sand, the foundational act of removal, or at least exclusion of the indigenes and then settlement, is somehow extrinsic to the process of nation formation. *Imagined Communities* is not the only work to have underscored the importance of creole or settler nationalism: Sand could have consulted a burgeoning field of comparative studies, from writers such as D. K. Fieldhouse, George Fredrickson, Patrick Wolfe and, a *sine qua non* for Israel/Palestine, Gershon Shafir.

Sand's failure to discuss the question of settler colonialism ultimately leads him to adhere to Hans Kohn's questionable distinction between East and Central European *völkisch* or organic nationalism on the one hand, and Western, especially Anglo-Saxon, civic and liberal nationalism on the other. Such a schema supposes that the nationalism of Western settler societies, whose formation was predicated on their purity vis-à-vis the indigenous peoples, was less *völkisch* than the German or Polish cases simply because the former excluded colonized natives whereas the latter excluded Jews. Moreover, by ignoring the centrality of settler nationalism to an understanding of the Zionist Israeli project, Sand misses an insight into the theme of the invented Jewish 'nation-race', as he terms it: the context for the increasing obsession with purity was not European nationalism in the abstract, but specific and concrete settler projects, in which constructing the impregnable purity of the settler nation relative to the indigenes—unless and until they were removed—was absolutely crucial.

A further example of the consequences of Sand's neglect of this theme comes in his discussion of the Old Testament. The Tanakh served as the pivot for the myth of the Jewish People, Sand asserts, from Graetz's historical magnum opus in the 19th century to Ben-Gurion's Bible project in the 1950s. But between Graetz and Ben-Gurion stood an actual settler project, and in particular the ethnic cleansing of 1948, in which Ben-Gurion played a central

role and for which the Book of Joshua was retrospectively inspirational. This creates a rupture between Graetz's use of the Bible and Ben-Gurion's that is as significant as the continuity. To ignore this difference is a flaw not only in intellectual terms, but also ethically and politically, for from the perspective of the indigenous Arabs it is the only thing that mattered: Graetz's Bible was harmless, whilst Ben-Gurion's was eliminatory.

The political message of Sand's book—that the Jewish state should be replaced by a republic offering, at least constitutionally, universal suffrage—has gained a much wider reception in Israel itself than many other counter-hegemonic works. It has certainly not been ignored, which is the well-rehearsed way of dooming a dissenting text to oblivion. Sand has received broad media coverage and many reviews, including a mildly positive notice from the post-Zionist historian Tom Segev; and, from the non-Zionist left, a viciously sardonic attack by Yizhak Laor, who accused Sand of colluding with that which he set out to criticize—like Balaam, who had been sent to curse the Children of Israel but ended up blessing them. The book also touched a raw nerve in two notable representatives of the Zionist centre-left: Israel Bartal and Anita Shapira each wrote lengthy review essays seeking to refute Sand's main thesis as well as more specific arguments; the title of Shapira's contribution—'The Jewish People Deniers'—marking an obvious attempt to up the rhetorical stakes. Both Bartal and Shapira attempt to dismiss Sand's debunking of a systematic exiling of Judean Jews and of the idea that the Jews constitute an ethno-biological people, genetically contiguous with those exiled from Judea. They attribute to Sand himself the invention of a twofold straw man. We (the competent and rational pro-Zionist Jewish historians), Shapira and Bartal assert, have always known that the story of the exile of the Judean Jews is a complex one, and we have always said that, given their history, the Jews cannot be an ethno-biological people.

To declare so categorically that both the hegemonic myths Sand addresses are his own hallucinatory invention is not just disingenuous, it begs the lexicographical redefinition of disingenuousness. Yet for all his methodical exposure of these myths, Sand would have been on much firmer political and empirical ground if he had anchored his argument in the concrete, and comparable, context of the budding settler state's need to wrest the land away from its indigenous inhabitants and render itself pure vis-à-vis that indigenous community. After all, it was the imperatives of colonial dispossession that prompted not only the forcible removal of the Palestinian people and the destruction of their civilization, but also the creation of a history that would legitimate these erasures.

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OWEN HATHERLEY

POST-POSTMODERNISM?

How should the artistic production of the current period be defined? The aesthetics of the neoliberal age have proved difficult to pinpoint. In architecture, typically postmodernist devices seem to have entered a terminal decline, as historical eclecticism and glib ironies have been replaced by rediscoveries of modernist forms—albeit emptied of political or theoretical content—in the showpiece buildings of figures such as Norman Foster or Daniel Libeskind. In the realm of art, meanwhile, the wilful amorality and egoism of the 80s and 90s, whether of Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst or Tracey Emin, has given way to an ostensibly more serious, high-minded tone and a revival of interest in 20th-century avant-gardes. But does this trend represent a break with postmodernism—or does it merely mark the arrival of a pseudomodernism of the gallery, to go with the pseudomodernism of contemporary architecture?

The work of the writer and curator Nicolas Bourriaud is one of the most prominent attempts to define, defend and evaluate the art of recent years. Bourriaud is best known for his 1998 book *Relational Aesthetics*, translated into English in 2002, which treated the interactivity and audience participation of late-90s conceptual art as a significant artistic paradigm in itself. Works by Pierre Huyghe, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Liam Gillick and others were held to 'produce relations' with the viewer which supposedly transcend the divide between artist and consumer. Here 'the beholder contributes his whole body'—as with the winding slide installed in Tate Modern by Carsten Höller—in a setting described as 'convivial, user-friendly . . . festive, collective and participatory'. This was an art of enclaves, of 'micro-utopias' which

replaced any notion that the world (outside the momentary relation reproduced in the gallery space) could be transformed.

The term 'relational art' was rapidly taken up in the art-world, to the point where it became a cliché. Despite the unappealing qualities of Bourriaud's style—a mix of unlovely prose, sententious theoretical reflections and noxious flattery of favoured artists—his concepts were even taken seriously by theorists and critics outside the gallery circuit; there was a notably ill-tempered exchange around them in the pages of *October*. Bourriaud's interest in works that produce 'relations' might be seen as a depoliticized version of Situationist attempts to disrupt consumption and spectacle; as Bourriaud himself puts it, relational art 'updates Situationism [sic] and reconciles it, as far as it is possible, with the art world'. The impression of postmodern fatalism was reinforced by *Postproduction* (2002), in which Bourriaud rebranded contemporary art as 'a set of activities linked with the service industry and recycling', with the artist akin to the 'DJ or the programmer', a 'semionaut' who 'inserts their own work into that of others'. Among examples of artists referencing and 'remaking' works from the (often recent) past, he cites Pierre Huyghe's *banlieue*-set remake of *Rear Window* or Douglas Gordon's Hitchcock tribute, *24 Hour Psycho*. Comparisons between this kind of citation and the sampling of hip-hop, techno or jungle are unconvincing: no acquaintance with the originals is necessary for listeners to appreciate the hundreds of tracks based on them, whereas the allusions of video artists to Hitchcock or Fassbinder are relentlessly tedious for anyone who has not seen the films in question, and frequently for them also. Besides, even with the participatory relational trimmings, the most immersive gallery environment is unable to compete with the coldest of clubs.

Postproduction was symptomatic in its unashamed praise for the derivative nature of contemporary art, where 'the issue is no longer to fabricate an object, but to choose one amongst those that exist, and use or modify it according to a specific intention'; the ad hoc pile-up of goods of the flea market became an artistic paradigm. Again we find a deliberate depoliticization of the Situationists, this time with reference to their theory of *détournement*, here made over into a 'utilization' of that which already exists rather than its 'devalorization'. Bourriaud also expressed a marked hostility to modernism as anything other than source material, in a manner wholly familiar after thirty years of postmodernism:

The end of the Modernist telos (the notions of progress and the avant-garde) opens a new space for thought; what is now at stake is to positivize the remake, to articulate uses, to place forms in relation to each other, rather than to embark on the heroic quest for the forbidden and the sublime that characterized modernism.

It is all the more surprising, then, to find Bourriaud now declaring postmodernism dead and buried, and attempting to put a rejuvenated modernism in its place. 'Altermodern' is his term for this new art-historical moment, and also the title for Tate Britain's fourth Triennial exhibition, which he curated earlier this year. In what does it consist? Bourriaud and his stable of artists and essayists go some way towards defining the Altermodern in the catalogue for the exhibition, but a more sustained attempt can be found in *The Radicant*. This slim book takes its title from an opposition Bourriaud sets up between 'roots' and 'radicants' in order to criticize postmodernism, globalization and (a certain kind of) multiculturalism, all now held to demand an identity politics of groundedness and nationality. He defines the radicant as:

a term designating an organism that grows its roots and adds new ones as it advances. To be radicant means setting one's roots in motion, staging them in heterogeneous contexts and formats, denying them the power to completely define one's identity, translating ideas, transcoding images, transplanting behaviours, exchanging rather than imposing.

This is all too typical of contemporary artspeak, in which things are constantly in the process of some kind of activity, 'negotiating', 'reconstellating', 'reconfiguring' and so forth; terms that are essentially interchangeable. The style is derived at several removes from the conceptual apparatus of Deleuze and Guattari—for radicants and roots read rhizomes and arborescences—and functions as a syntactic complement to Bourriaud's arguments, in that the diffuse, vague nature of his claims mirrors the lack of fixity and groundedness being proselytized.

The idea that postmodernism was too essentialist, too grounded, will no doubt surprise some of its adherents. But Bourriaud contends that globalization and postmodernism have encouraged a fetishization of fixed roots and indigenous soil, an 'exalting of difference' which effaces the montage and modernity that actually define experience in the areas whose roots are fetishized—largely, the global South. He then conflates this postmodernism with globalization, understood as multinational capitalism—an ideology of difference that actually conceals a totalizing logic, in which borders are reinforced for people at the same time they are opened for capital, and national difference is preserved for the purpose of touristic edification. The Altermodern is held out as the aesthetic equivalent of the 'Alterglobalization' movement, the art gallery's answer to the jingle 'another world is possible'—curious, given the disdain for wider political transformation displayed in Bourriaud's previous works.

The other worlds that are apparently now possible are to be 'discovered' through travel and miscegenation, rather than merely through visits to art galleries. Bourriaud's text is pervaded by notions of movement,

translation and bastardization. The nomad and the polyglot are the heroes of Altermodernity, though it is never entirely clear what differentiates them in his schema from the less romantic figure of the tourist. (Bourriaud's discussion of his own 'nomadic' life implies the preposterous notion that the life of the freelance curator is in some way analogous to that of the illegal immigrant.) The exemplary Altermodern figure is the early 20th-century French traveller, novelist, art critic and poet Victor Segalen, who receives the most sustained reading of any theorist or thinker in *The Radicant*. Segalen's accounts of his travels to Tahiti and to China are endorsed for their refusal of the familiar colonialist and exoticizing discourse in favour of another, more sophisticated exotica. According to Bourriaud, Segalen's work presents the possibility of a 'Twenty-First Century Creole', a bastardized language that is quintessentially Altermodernist in the same way that Esperanto, with its combining of already existing languages into a universal system, is apparently specifically Modernist.

The critique of postmodern multiculturalism that Bourriaud derives from Segalen is based on the claim that, contrary to the obsession over Otherness, 'there is no other; rather there are other places, *elsewheres*, none of which is original, still less a subject for comparison'. It is hard to escape the conclusion that Bourriaud has merely exchanged one kind of exoticism, based on a fetish for spaces untouched by modernity, for another drawing upon contradictions between a global modernity and national specificity, which throw up fascinatingly untamed and raw forms for the edification of the art-tourist. In each case, the exotic remains an object for Western contemplation, and there is little sense that the West might be part of the same feedback loop. This became all too clear in the *Altermodern* exhibition itself, where some works appear to have been deliberately included to signal their exoticism. Navin Rawanchaikul's mural 'Navin's Sala' hangs near the entrance, a large, bright frieze based on the aesthetic of Indian film posters and advertisements, here deployed in the service of artistic self-aggrandizement. In a letter to Rawanchaikul reproduced in the catalogue, Bourriaud draws attention to this apparently typically Indian 'abundance', marvelling at how the artist 'composes a little Mahabharata of contemporary art'. Otherwise, the show's exoticism is at the level of holiday snaps: Darren Almond's ornamental photographs of misty Japanese mountain landscapes seem designed to be placed on the walls of restaurants or in the opening credits of martial arts epics, without any hint of aesthetic self-awareness. This reaches a particularly grotesque nadir in the catalogue, where Carsten Höller, talking about his holidays in the Congo, notes that what really differentiates Congolese life from 'ours' is their dancing. Indeed.

Bourriaud's critique of postmodern multiculturalism relies to a certain extent upon the work of Alain Badiou, a frequent point of reference.

Bourriaud has a persistent and clearly deliberate tendency to throw together disparate thinkers and artists, while ignoring any elements of their thought he finds unpalatable—something he would no doubt justify as a ‘Creolization’ of theory. So at the same time as appropriating Badiou’s critique of the ideology of difference, Bourriaud rejects the universalism central to Badiou’s thought—viewed as a Hegelian leftover from modernism’s relentless forward motion. Here Bourriaud’s critique of totality is wholly postmodernist. He takes a stand against difference and against universalism, but in favour of a sort of circuitous travel, a ‘wandering’, which he considers to be potentially oppositional. The new modernity will upset traditional cultures and ethnic essentialisms. But how should it be ‘structurally defined’, he asks?

As a collective setting in motion. Far from aping the signs of yesterday’s modernism, it is a matter today of negotiating and deliberating; rather than miming the gestures of radicality, it is a matter of inventing those that correspond to our own era.

Although he disparages mere imitation of avant-garde gestures, it is telling that Bourriaud can offer little in its place but more junk syntax, gesturing towards an unspecified process that can be applied anywhere, irrespective of form, politics or concepts.

The Radicant repeatedly repudiates the Thatcherite slogan, ‘there is no alternative’, which Bourriaud describes as a sort of background noise to all practice, an ‘ambient discourse’ which must be consciously resisted. The sentiment may be welcome, particularly after the aggressively ‘apolitical’ reign of Britain’s commercialized variant of conceptualism. Yet when describing the resistance that Altermodern art can provide, Bourriaud again lapses into vague imprecations: ‘if contemporary art is the bearer of a coherent political project, it is surely this: to introduce precariousness into the very heart of the system of representations . . . to weaken all systems, to endow the most well-established habits with the appearance of exotic rituals’.

There are hints here of the notion that precarious art reveals the hidden precarity of everyday life—a conception reminiscent of Shklovsky’s *ostranenie*, but without the sense given to it by Brecht, Tretiakov or Benjamin, for whom making strange was an explicitly political project, in part through the politicization of the production of art itself. In fact, it is in the work of Benjamin—another figure in Bourriaud’s Altermodernist pick’n’mix—that we can find precisely what is missing from ‘radicant’ art. The critique of art as contemplation Benjamin makes in both ‘The Author as Producer’ and the ‘Work of Art’ essay contrasts sharply with Bourriaud’s approach: where the latter strews the gallery or museum with beanbags and cushions, Benjamin’s response was to do away with such spaces entirely, and with

them the fine artist, the patron, the contemplative bourgeois audience and, no doubt, the curator.

This side of Benjamin's thought is useless to Bourriaud. The reason is obvious—Benjamin examines artistic production and consumption. Both of these terms are almost entirely absent in Bourriaud's work. *The Radicant* gives the impression that contemporary art, that playground for retired arms dealers and competing oligarchs, is somehow outside of the profit system. At this point the reader's eye might be drawn to Bourriaud's current job description: 'Gulbenkian Curator of Contemporary Art at Tate Britain'. That is, he is funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, named after an Armenian oil magnate. Aside from being a prolific sponsor of contemporary art since the 1950s, the Foundation is the sole owner of the Portuguese oil and gas holding company Partex, which is particularly active in Abu Dhabi, where an entire island has been set aside for the artistic gratification of the ruling oligarchy. These facts do not in themselves make what Bourriaud has to say worthless—dubious money is a near-constant in the art world—but they do raise the question of whether his disdain for corporate culture stems from political considerations or simple snobbery.

At no point in any of his work does Bourriaud even discuss who is buying the art he describes, who is producing it and distributing it, or in many cases, who is actually making it. This is particularly significant with regard to those artists whose work fits most precisely the terms of Bourriaud's theory. Take, for instance, the 'FedEx Sculptures' of Walead Beshty—glass boxes, transported from more or less remote destinations, exhibited on top of the empty crates in which they were shipped, and displaying all the cracks and damage inflicted in the process of getting them to the gallery. This aesthetization draws attention to the transportation of the artworks, but it does so in a remarkably static way—we learn absolutely nothing about either the modes of transport or people involved; we are asked only to applaud Beshty's clever conceit. A similar move is apparent in the work of Simon Starling, another regular touchstone for Bourriaud—'one of those artists who thematize the traceability of things, who analyse the social and economic components of our environment'. He cites Starling's most famous work 'Shedboatshed', a shed on the Rhine that Starling reconstructed into a boat and then reconstructed back into a shed, this time as an exhibit in Basle, an object for artistic contemplation. However, the journey of the shed from Basle to the Tate and the reconstruction of it in the art gallery are not included in the artwork, for the simple reason that they are not part of the artist's narrative, not touched by his auratic presence.

The figure of the artist gets not even the most cursory scrutiny in any of Bourriaud's writings. Indeed, no artist is ever criticized or questioned. Countless contemporary art practitioners are name-checked, in a constant

present tense, as intrepid semionauts perpetually traversing, negotiating, mediating and interrogating this or that. One example from many:

When Pierre Joseph goes to Japan to station himself in front of a factory that produces telephone parts, soliciting workers to teach him how to manufacture various components, he introduces a clandestine element into the workplace. Starting from a position of non-knowledge, he uses a factory as a turntable.

And here is another from *Relational Aesthetics*:

When Jens Hanning broadcasts funny stories in Turkish through a loudspeaker in a Copenhagen square, he produces in that split-second a micro-community, one made up of immigrants brought together by collective laughter which upsets their exile situation, formed in relation to the work and in it.

Such passages show Bourriaud's approach at its most symptomatic. The international artists appear able to transcend class, stepping blithely into productive spheres different from their own, entering into factories and immigrant communities without any tension or hostility. We learn little about what these communities themselves think about being 'related to' in this fashion, but we are led to assume that they very much enjoy showing artists the assembly line, or that they require an artist to alleviate their exile status. It is easy to see what makes Bourriaud so popular among artists: in essence, he is offering them a heroic narrative. Hence, perhaps, the loop of mutual indulgence and flattery that is such a remarkable feature of his books—and especially of the *Altermodern* catalogue, which reproduces glowingly unctuous 'letters' between the curator and his artists.

How should we assess the art itself? Many of the works featured in *Altermodern* are essentially curatorial assemblages, in the mode described by *Postproduction*—footnotes to earlier historical moments, references to classic artworks or 'revalorizations' of jumble-sale tat. Some of these are diverting, generally the more so the less blandly obvious the subject matter. Olivia Plender's exhumation of the Kibbo Kift, a forgotten but briefly notorious British *Wandervögel* which campaigned for 'Social Credit' during the Great Depression, or Tacita Dean's densely atmospheric and faintly uncanny annotated photographs, manage to be less tedious than much of *Altermodern*. But overall, the exhibition's assortment of installations and videos is largely indistinguishable from any other conceptual show of the last decade or so, bar an occasional nod to notions of travel. The boxes can all be ticked—found objects, historical recontextualizations, inept videos with plenty of nudity, pseudo-shamanic performance, garish 'street art'—all of them familiar from the last decade or so, all of them previously theorized and flattered by Bourriaud himself.

If, however, Bourriaud's *Altermodernism* represents a diminution of the idea of the artist as producer to that of the artist as curator, it also marks the apotheosis of the curator as artist. Indeed, it is the jet-setting freelance curator who is the absent, untheorized centre of *The Radicant*—a demiurge who descends from the clouds to lay down paradigms and make sense of contemporary practice. Unlike *Relational Aesthetics*, however, this time Bourriaud's coinage has not stuck. The reason for this is clear enough: the immediate conditions of Postmodernism—the onward march of neoliberalism across all corners of the globe, the decline of socialism, the relentless expansion of the mass media—have not been superseded; the artistic landscape of eclecticism, travel and exchange that Bourriaud describes is postmodern to the core.

Yet this is postmodernism defanged. You will find nowhere in Bourriaud's work or the exhibits in *Altermodern* the dark, bleak wit of postmodernism at its height; the knowingly amoral approach of figures who provided a more discomfiting account of its conjuncture, such as Jean Baudrillard or J. G. Ballard, is entirely absent—replaced by a humourless simulation of vaguely leftist language and an art which disdains disruption, fear or sexuality, in favour of an alternation between arid conceptualism and cosy interactivity, with an accompanying game of spot-the-reference. Far from representing a break with postmodernism, Bourriaud's *Altermodernism* should if anything be seen as yet another instance of postmodernism trying to subsume modernism within itself. With its manifestos, its vague gestures towards politicization and its empty anti-neoliberal posturing, it plays at being modernist, but empties modernism of critique, of its attention to production and economics and its interest in an emancipatory mass culture. The *Altermodern* can ultimately be classed as a rearguard action, an attempt to inoculate recent art against criticism. But outside the flattered circle, few will be convinced.

VERSO RADICAL THINKERS IV



GILLIAN ROSE

HEGEL CONTRA SOCIOLOGY

FREDRIC JAMESON

THE CULTURAL TURN

ALTHUSSER & BALIBAR

READING CAPITAL

JEAN BAUDRILLARD

THE TRANSPARENCY OF EVIL

PAUL VIRILIO

WAR AND CINEMA

THEODOR ADORNO

IN SEARCH OF WAGNER

TERRY EAGLETON

WALTER BENJAMIN

CHANTAL MOUFFE

THE DEMOCRATIC PARADOX

WALTER BENJAMIN

ORIGIN OF GERMAN TRAGIC DRAMA

SIMON CRITCHLEY

ETHICS—POLITICS—SUBJECTIVITY

GEORG LUKÁCS

LENIN

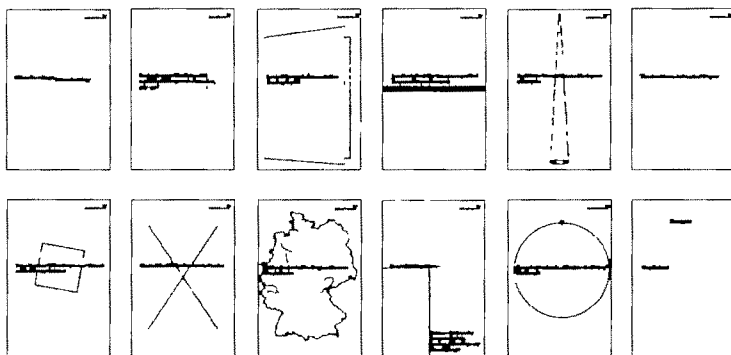
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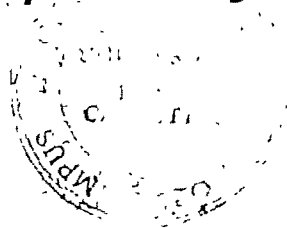


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Mary Callahan *Riddle of the Tatmadaw*

Erik Olin Wright *Class Patternings*

Joachim Kalka *Cents and Sensibility*


Gregor McLennan *On Malevolence*

A. Sivanandan *The Fate of Ceylon*

Tom Reifer *For Giovanni Arrighi*

John Grahl

Measuring World Disorders



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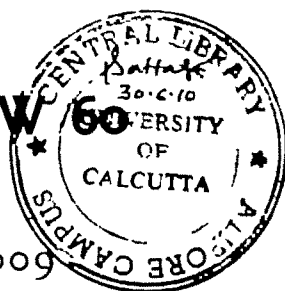
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PROGRAMME NOTES

HUNG HO-FUNG: America's Head Servant?

Against predictions that China will soon replace the US as the world's dominant economic power, Hung Ho-fung argues that the PRC's export-oriented growth and vast dollar reserves have trapped it in a subordinate role—to which much of its elite remains committed.

MARY CALLAHAN: Myanmar's Perpetual Junta

What explains the exceptional durability of the Tatmadaw? Mary Callahan looks to the regime's origins in struggles against British colonial rule, and to the impact of Whitehall's dual mapping of the country upon its complex ethnic patterns and social structures.

JOACHIM KALKA: Money As We Knew It

As coins and banknotes are displaced by credit cards and virtual transactions, Joachim Kalka conjures twin visions of money's sensuous effects—prompting mystical revulsion or cartoonish delight—from the disappearing world of cash.

A. SIVANANDAN: An Island Tragedy

A. Sivanandan recounts his country's long road to ethnic cleansing, from the social engineering of colonial Ceylon to Colombo's anti-Tamil campaigns. Marginalization, displacement and destruction of a people, in a communal onslaught fanned by Buddhist chauvinism.

ERIK OLIN WRIGHT: Understanding Class

Conventionally seen as mutually opposed, could insights from the three principal paradigms of class analysis—Marxist, Weberian and stratification theories—be combined? Erik Olin Wright offers models for an integrated approach.

TOM REIFER: Capital's Cartographer

A former pupil recalls Giovanni Arrighi's world-spanning trajectory, landmark intellectual contributions and great personal generosity. Geographies of power, histories of inequality in the work of one of the leading analysts of our times.

BOOK REVIEWS

JOHN GRAHL on Michel Aglietta and Laurent Berrebi, *Désordres du capitalisme mondial*. A prescient *état des lieux* of the global economy, identifying its imbalances and possible future trajectories.

GREGOR MCLENNAN on Peter Dews, *The Idea of Evil*. Exploration of the nature—and necessity?—of humankind's moral orientation, tracing a thread from Kant and Hegel to Nietzsche and Adorno.

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AMERICA'S HEAD SERVANT?

The PRC's Dilemma in the Global Crisis

THE SUBPRIME MORTGAGE crisis and ensuing global downturn led many to speculate whether any challenger might emerge to replace the US as the dominant player in the capitalist world economy.¹ Because the financial crisis in the US and global North had originated in high indebtedness, low productivity and overconsumption, it seemed natural to look to their polar opposites—the East Asian exporters' huge holdings of US debt, productive capacity and high savings rates—to identify likely candidates. Immediately after last year's collapse of Lehman Brothers lifted the curtain on the global recession, there were proclamations of the final triumph of the East Asian, and above all Chinese, model of development; American establishment commentators concluded that the Great Crash of 2008 would be the catalyst for a shift of the centre of global capitalism from the US to China.²

But by the spring of 2009, many had realized that the East Asian economies were not as formidable as appearances had suggested. While the sharp contraction in demand for imports in the global North had led to crash landings for Asia's exporters, the prospect of either the US Treasuries market or the dollar bottoming out presented them with the difficult dilemma of either ditching American assets, and hence triggering a dollar collapse, or buying more, preventing an immediate crash but increasing their exposure to one in future. State-directed investment, rolled out late last year under the PRC's mega-stimulus programme, fostered a significant recovery for China as well as its Asian trading partners, but the growth generated is unlikely to be self-sustaining. Chinese economists and policy advisers have been worrying that the PRC will

falter again once the stimulus effect fades, as it is unlikely that American consumers will be picking up the slack any time soon. Despite all the talk of China's capacity to destroy the dollar's reserve-currency status and construct a new global financial order, the PRC and its neighbours have few choices in the short term other than to sustain American economic dominance by extending more credit.

In what follows, I will trace the historical and social origins of the deepening dependence of China and East Asia on the consumer markets of the global North as the source of their growth, and on US financial vehicles as the store of value for their savings. I then assess the longer-term possibilities for ending this dependence, arguing that, to create a more autonomous economic order in Asia, China would have to transform an export-oriented growth model—which has mostly benefited, and been perpetuated by, vested interests in the coastal export sectors—into one driven by domestic consumption, through a large-scale redistribution of income to the rural-agricultural sector. This will not be possible, however, without breaking the coastal urban elite's grip on power.

Tigers and geese

The story of the rapid postwar rise of Japan and the four Tigers—South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore—is well known, and need not be repeated here. But if their dynamic ascent can be attributed to the role of their centralized authorities in directing precious resources to strategic industrial sectors, it is equally important to recognize that it was the Cold War geopolitics of East Asia that made developmental states possible there in the first place. What was being fought during the Cold War period in East Asia was actually a hot war. Communist China's support for guerrillas and its involvement in the Korean and Vietnam wars had led the region into a permanent state of emergency, and Washington regarded East Asia as the most vulnerable link in its strategy for containing Communism. Considering its key Asian allies—Japan and the four Tigers—too important to fail, it provided them with

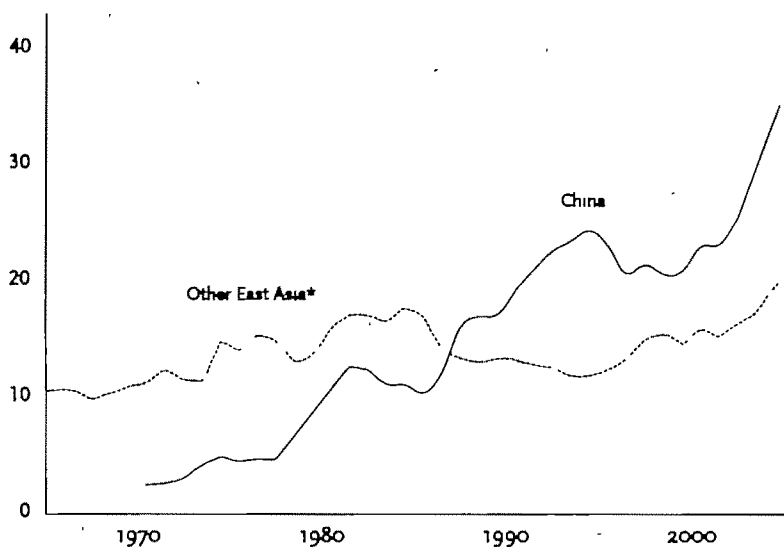
¹ An earlier version of this essay was presented at the conference hosted by the Universidad Nómada and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, in honour of Giovanni Arrighi on 25–29 May 2009. I am grateful for comments from other participants there.

² See Roger Altman, 'The Great Crash, 2008: A Geopolitical Setback for the West', *Foreign Affairs*, January–February 2009.

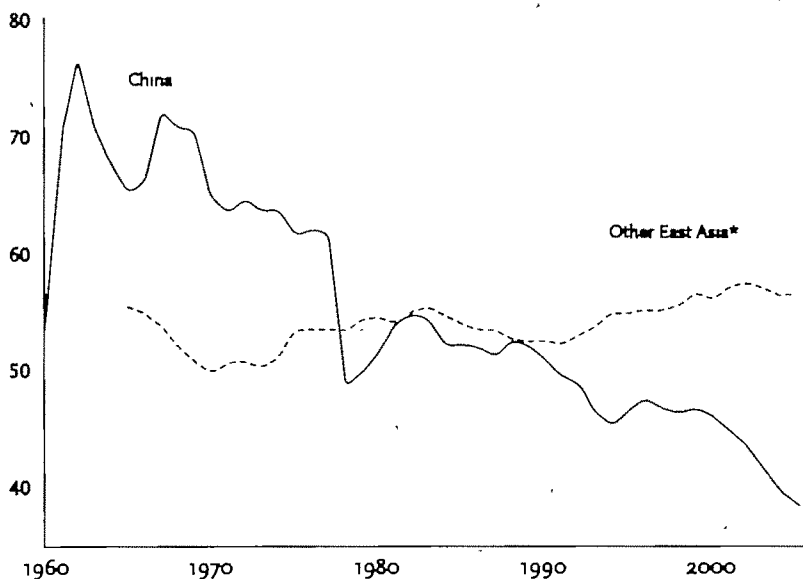
abundant financial and military aid to jump-start and direct industrial growth, while also keeping American and European markets wide open to Asian manufactured goods. This access to Western markets constituted a further advantage that other developing countries did not enjoy, and without which it is unimaginable that the Asian economies would have had such success. Viewed in this light, the rapid economic growth of East Asia was far from a 'miracle'. The US engineered it as part of an effort to create subordinate and prosperous bulwarks against Communism in the Asia-Pacific region. These economies were never meant to challenge American geopolitical and geo-economic interests; instead they were subservient clients helping Washington to realize its designs in the region.

Organized in multilayered subcontracting production networks centred on Japan, Asian exporters occupied different links in the value chain, each specializing in goods at a particular level of profitability and technological sophistication. Japan focused on the most high-value-added items, the four Tigers on middle-range products and the emerging Tigers in Southeast Asia on low-cost, labour-intensive ones. This famous flying-geese pattern formed a network of reliable suppliers of a wide range of consumer products to the First World.

When Cold War tensions started to ease in the 1980s, US current-account and fiscal deficits were mounting as a result of neoliberal tax cuts and escalating military expenditure in the final stages of the Cold War. Instead of breaking out of the orbit of American hegemony, however, the Asian economies tightened their ties to the US by financing its skyrocketing twin deficits. East Asia's export-oriented industrialization had been coupled with low domestic consumption. Subsequent trade surpluses and high savings rates enabled these states to accumulate substantial financial power in the form of large foreign-exchange reserves. Regarding US Treasuries as the safest investment in global finance, most East Asian exporters voluntarily parked their hoarded cash in low-yield US Treasury bonds, turning themselves into America's principal creditors. Their financing of the US current-account deficit then fuelled America's appetite for Asian imports, and the further increase in Asian trade surpluses led to yet more purchases of Treasury bonds. These mutually reinforcing processes continuously amplified East Asia's market and financial dependence on the US, helping to prolong its fragile prosperity while American hegemony unravelled.

FIGURE 1. *Exports as a share of GDP in East Asian economies, 1965–2004*

* Other East Asia represents the average of Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, and excludes Hong Kong and Singapore because of the large share of entrepôt trade in their economies.
Source: World Bank and Taiwan Economic Data Center, ARIMOS database.

FIGURE 2. *Private consumption as a share of GDP in East Asian economies*

* Other East Asia represents average of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong.
Source: World Bank and Taiwan Economic Data Center, ARIMOS database.

TABLE I. *East Asian exports to the US and the world (in trillions of US\$)*

	1985		1995		2005	
	US	World	US	World	US	World
China	2.3	27.3	24.7	149	163.3	762.3
Japan	66.7	177.3	122	443.3	136	594.9
South Korea	10.8	30.3	24.3	131.3	41.5	284.3
Taiwan	14.8	30.7	26.4	113	29.1	198
Hong Kong	9.3	30.2	37.9	173.6	46.5	289.5
Singapore	4.8	23	21.6	118.2	23.9	207.3

Source: IMF Direction of Trade Statistics and Taiwan Economic Data Center ARIMOS database

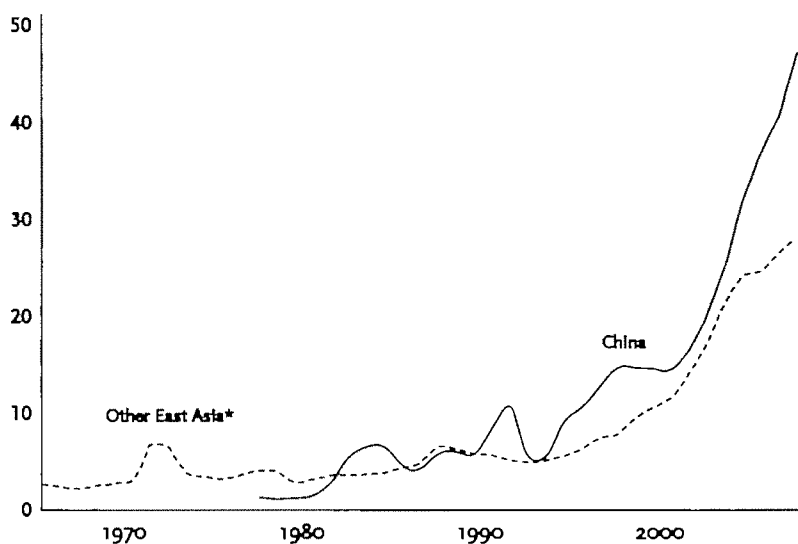
Beginning in the 1980s and accelerating in the 90s, the PRC's market reforms turned it into a latecoming Asian Tiger. Many predicted that it would be uniquely capable of breaking away from Asia's twin dependence on the US because of its geopolitical autonomy and exceptional demographic and economic size. But so far China has not freed itself from the servitude of providing America with cheap credit and low-cost imports. Worse, the intensity of the PRC's export-led and private-consumption-repressing growth model has made its market and financial dependence on the US even greater than that of its predecessors. If we compare the most important aspects of China's political economy with those of its neighbours at a similar stage of development, we find that the Chinese model is largely a replication in extreme form of earlier East Asian growth. Figure 1 shows that the Chinese economy's trade dependence, as measured by the total value of exports as a percentage of GDP, has been mounting continuously, reaching a level never attained in other East Asian economies. On the other hand, the weight of Chinese private consumption as a percentage of GDP has been declining, dropping well below that of the other countries during their takeoff (Figure 2). As Table 1 indicates, for China—like Japan and the Asian Tigers before it—the US is the single most important export market, only surpassed recently by the EU taken as a whole. China has already become America's leading Asian supplier.

The drastic expansion of China's export industries not only accounts for its stellar economic growth, but also, through its enlarged trade surplus, its global financial power. As shown in Figure 3 opposite, China's foreign-exchange reserves now well exceed those of its East Asian neighbours. So far China has, like the other exporters, been investing most of its savings in US Treasury bonds. By the eve of the subprime mortgage crisis, China had emerged as the largest exporter to the US and at the same time its largest creditor, financing America's current-account deficit and sustaining its capacity to absorb imports (see Figure 4). While China's low-cost exports helped lower US inflation, its massive purchase of Treasury bonds helped reduce their yields and thus also US interest rates. In so doing, China emerged in recent years as the principal upholder of US economic vitality.

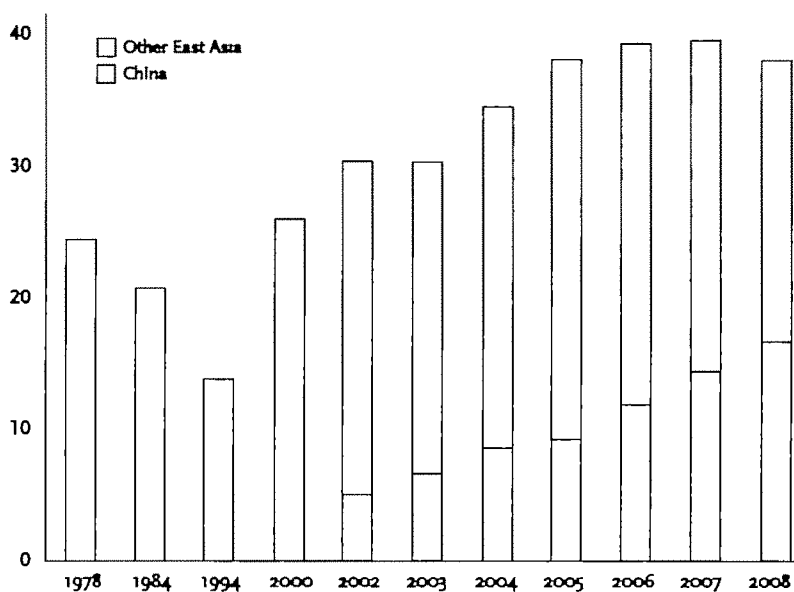
Agrarian crisis

China's ability to institute an extreme version of the East Asian export-led growth model over the last three decades hinged on both the global conjuncture and the PRC's internal political economy. First, China's labour-intensive takeoff coincided with the onset of an unprecedented expansion in global free trade since the 1980s. Were it not for the outsourcing of industry from the global North and the latter's mounting appetite for low-cost manufactured imports, the PRC would have found it impossible to export its way to prosperity. More importantly, China's exceptional competitiveness is largely founded on the prolonged stagnation of manufacturing wages in comparison with other Asian countries at equivalent stages of development.

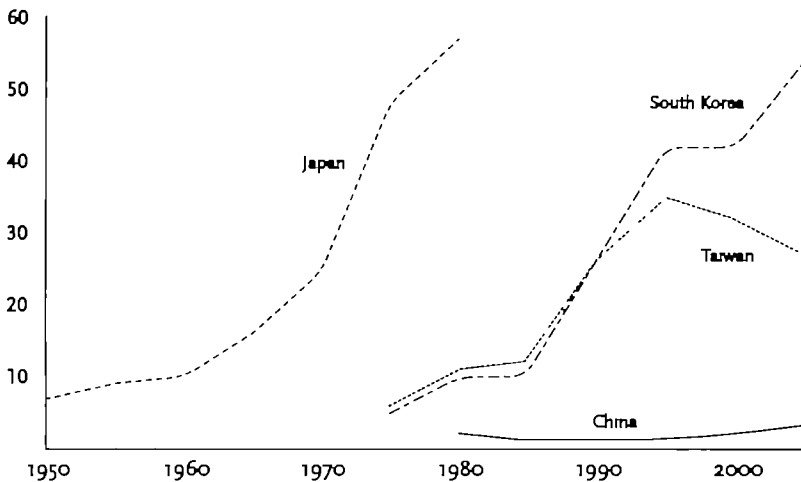
Many argue that China's wage competitiveness originates in its fixed exchange-rate regime, which undervalues its currency considerably. Others assert that China's huge surplus of rural labour allowed it to develop with an 'unlimited' supply of labour for much longer than other Asian economies. But closer scrutiny reveals both of these explanations to be inadequate. First, as Figure 5 (overleaf) shows, the difference between China's wage levels and those of its neighbours is much greater than could be explained by an undervalued currency. Even if the yuan appreciated by 20–30 per cent relative to the dollar—as many American critics of China's currency manipulation advocate—Chinese wages would still be significantly lower. Second, an unlimited supply of labour is not a natural phenomenon given by China's population structure, as is

FIGURE 3. *Foreign-exchange reserves as a percentage of GDP in East Asia*

* Other East Asia represents average of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong.
Source: World Bank and Taiwan Economic Data Center, ARIEMOS database.

FIGURE 4. *East Asian and Chinese shares of long-term US public debt (%)*

Source: US Treasury.

FIGURE 5. *East Asian manufacturing wage as a percentage of US wage*

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Foreign Labor Statistics (Japan and Asian Tigers), China Statistical Yearbook.

so often assumed. Rather, it is a consequence of the government's rural-agricultural policies which, intentionally or unintentionally, bankrupt the countryside and generate a continuous rural exodus.

The relation between these policies and low wage levels can be illustrated by contrasting China's rural development with that of Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, which also had large rural populations and agrarian sectors at the beginning of their economic takeoff. In postwar Japan, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party had actively directed resources to the countryside through rural infrastructure spending, agricultural development financing, farm subsidies and tariffs on foreign produce. In South Korea, the Park regime launched the New Village Movement (Saemaul Undong) in the early 1970s, diverting significant fiscal resources to upgrade rural infrastructure, finance agricultural mechanization, and set up rural educational institutions and co-operatives. This initiative was a remarkable success: it increased rural household income from 67 per cent of urban income in 1970 to 95 per cent in 1974, virtually obliterating the rural-urban income gap.³ In Taiwan, the KMT government

³ John Lie, 'The State, Industrialization and Agricultural Sufficiency: The Case of South Korea', *Development Policy Review*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1991, pp. 37-51.

pursued similar policies in the 1960s and 70s, alongside conscious efforts to promote rural industrialization. The resulting decentralized structure of Taiwanese industry allowed farmers to work seasonally in nearby factories without abandoning farming altogether or migrating to big cities. This helped retain a considerable share of labour resources in the village, fostering a more balanced rural–urban growth; throughout the 1960s and 70s, per capita rural income was always above 60 per cent of the urban level. Under such policies, it is not surprising that the surplus of rural labour rapidly dried up and manufacturing wages soared in these countries.

The reasons for the adoption of these different paths varied. In Japan, the significance of rural votes to the LDP's electoral success explained its attention to rural development. For the right-wing authoritarian regimes in South Korea and Taiwan, the promotion of rural-agricultural development was a way to minimize the social dislocation that usually accompanies industrialization and preempt the rise of leftist influences in the countryside. It was also a crucial way to ensure food security in the context of Cold War tensions. In contrast, China's industrial development since the mid-1980s has been much more imbalanced than that of Japan, South Korea or Taiwan. Over the last twenty years, the Chinese government has largely concentrated investment in the urban-industrial sector, particularly in coastal areas, with rural and agricultural investment lagging behind. State-owned banks have also focused their efforts on financing urban-industrial development, while rural and agricultural financing were neglected. In the last two decades, rural per capita income has never exceeded 40 per cent of the urban level.

This urban bias emerged at least partly due to the dominance of a powerful urban-industrial elite from the Southern coastal regions—a segment which germinated after China's initial integration into the global economy, expanded its financial resources and political influence with the export boom, and became increasingly adept at shaping central government policy in its favour. According to a recent assessment, the CCP's 'elitist faction'—comprised of senior leaders who built their careers in coastal regions and in trade and finance administrations—controls more seats in the Politburo than their rival 'populist faction', which has stronger ties to inland provinces. Though Hu Jintao, the current head of state, is a leader of the populist faction, Xi Jinping—chosen by the Party to succeed Hu in 2012 over Hu's own favourite—had been the head of the

coastal provinces of Fujian and Zhejiang, and is a leading figure in the elitist faction.⁴ Their growing leverage ensured that more attention was given to enhancing China's export competitiveness and attractiveness to foreign investment, rather than to agrarian development. The urban revolts of 1989—stemming from hyper-inflation and deteriorating living standards in big cities—only made the party-state more determined to ensure the economic prosperity of metropolitan areas at the expense of the countryside in the 1990s.

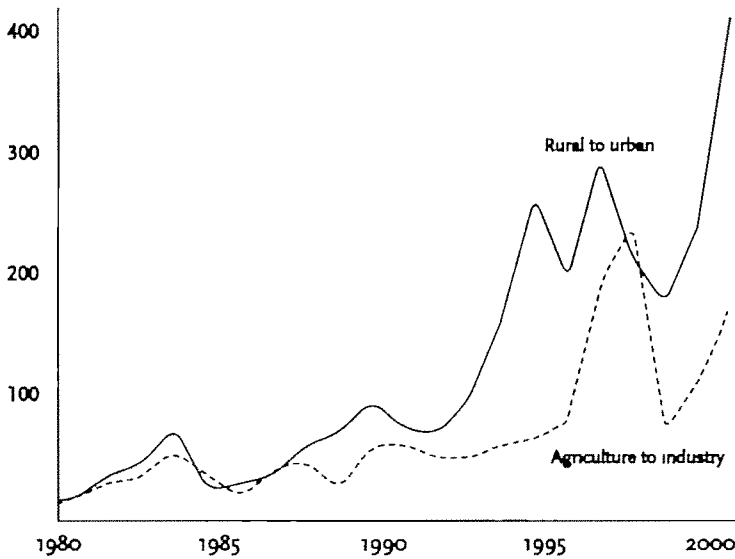
The result of this urban bias has been relative economic stagnation in the countryside and a concomitant fiscal stringency on the part of rural local governments. From the 1990s onwards, the deterioration of agricultural incomes and the demise of collective rural industries—the township and village enterprises (TVEs) which used to be vibrant generators of employment in the early stages of market reform—forced most young labourers in the countryside to leave for the city, creating a vicious cycle which has precipitated a rural social crisis. China's agrarian sector was not only neglected, however, it was also exploited in support of urban growth. A recent study has found that there was a sustained and increasing net transfer of resources from the rural-agricultural to the urban-industrial sector between 1978 and 2000, both through fiscal policy (via taxation and government spending) and the financial system (via savings deposits and loans).⁵ The exceptions to this trend were the years when the urban economy experienced a temporary downturn, such as the aftermath of the 1997–98 Asian Financial Crisis (see Figure 6, opposite).

The PRC's urban-biased development model, then, is the source of China's prolonged 'limitless' supply of labour, and thus of the wage stagnation that has characterized its economic miracle. This pattern also accounts for China's rising trade surplus, the source of its growing global financial power. However, the low wages and rural living standards that have resulted from this development strategy have constrained China's domestic consumer market and deepened its dependence on the global North's consumption demand, which increasingly relies on massive borrowing from China and other Asian exporters. As those other

⁴ Cheng Li, 'One Party, Two Coalitions in China's Politics', Brookings Institute, 16 August 2009.

⁵ Huang Jikun, Scott Rozelle and Wang Honglin, 'Fostering or Stripping Rural China: Modernizing Agriculture and Rural to Urban Capital Flows', *The Developing Economies*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2006, pp. 1–26.

FIGURE 6. Total cash transfer from countryside to cities (billion yuan in constant prices)



Source: Huang, Rozelle and Wang, 'Fostering or Stripping Rural China'.

exporters have been integrated with China's export engine through the regionalization of industrial production networks, the vulnerabilities of the Chinese economy have turned into weaknesses of the East Asian region as a whole.

Sinocentric dependency

In the 1990s, China gradually established itself as the most competitive Asian exporter of products at various levels of technological sophistication. As a result, the others—including Japan and the original four Tigers, together with a group of emerging ones in Southeast Asia such as Malaysia and Thailand—were put under intense pressure to adjust. The PRC's competitiveness induced many export manufacturers to relocate there from elsewhere in Asia. An *Economist* report in 2001 noted the 'alarm and despair' with which China's neighbours reacted to its rise:

Japan, South Korea and Taiwan fear a 'hollowing out' of their industries, as factories move to low-cost China. Southeast Asia worries about 'dislocation'

in trade and investment flows. . . . China is no [flying] goose . . . because it makes simple goods and sophisticated ones at the same time, rag nappies and microchips . . . [It] makes goods spanning the entire value chain, on a scale that determines world prices. Hence East Asia's anxiety. If China is more efficient at everything, what is there left for its neighbours to do?⁶

It is certainly the case that China's neighbours painstakingly restructured their export sectors to minimize head-on competition with the PRC and profit from its rise. Under the old East Asian industrial order, each economy had exported specific groups of finished consumer products. Now these countries began to increase the proportion of high value-added components (Korea and Taiwan) and capital goods (Japan) in their exports to the People's Republic.

As Table 2 (opposite) indicates, exports to China from South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan overtook their exports to the US over the last decade, while those from Japan and Singapore to China rapidly approached the share of their exports going to America. By 2005, the Japan-centred flying geese model of Asian regionalism had been replaced by a Sinocentric production network in which China exported most final consumer goods to the global North on behalf of its Asian neighbours, which provided China with the necessary parts and machines for assembly. This structure can be seen as a team of servants with China at the head, leading the others in providing cheap exports to the US and using its hard-earned savings to finance American purchases of those exports.

Regional integration in East Asia is well reflected in the correlation between the ups and downs of China's export figures and those of its neighbours. For example, Asia's recovery from the financial crisis of 1997–98, and Japan's renewed growth after 2000, are attributable at least in part to the Chinese economic boom absorbing their manufactured components and capital goods. When the current global crisis began to unfold and consumer demand in the US started to contract sharply in the autumn of 2008, Asian exports plunged immediately, while those of the PRC dived to a similar extent only about three months later. The cause of this time lag was the fact that the drop in Asian exports was largely a function of a decline in orders for parts and capital goods from China, in anticipation of plummeting orders for the final products from America and elsewhere in the months to come. The limitations

⁶ 'A panda breaks the formation', *Economist*, 25 August 2001.

TABLE 2. *Exports to China and the US as percentage of total exports*

	1985		1995		2005	
	China	US	China	US	China	US
Japan	7.1	37.6	5	27.5	13.5	22.9
South Korea	0	35.6	7	18.5	21.8	14.6
Taiwan	0	18.1	0.3	23.3	22	14.7
Hong Kong	26	30.8	33.3	21.8	45	16.1
Singapore	1.5	21	2.3	18.3	9.5	11.5

Source: IMF Direction of Trade Statistics and Taiwan Economic Data Center ARIMOS database

of the Chinese development model—overdependence on consumption in the West and lethargic growth in the domestic market—inevitably translate into vulnerabilities for its Asian partners, leaving all of these economies exposed to any major contraction of consumption demand in the global North. Rebalancing China's development, therefore, is not only necessary for the sustainability of its economic growth, but also for the collective future of East Asia as an integrated economic bloc.

Obstacles to rebalancing

Chinese and East Asian governments have employed their foreign reserves to purchase US debt not only in search of presumably stable and safe returns, but also as part of a deliberate effort to finance America's escalating current-account deficit, and hence secure a continuous increase in US demand for their own exports. But the deficit cannot expand indefinitely, and could eventually result in the collapse of the dollar or the Treasuries market and a hike in interest rates, putting an end to America's consumption spree. This would not only be a mortal blow to China's export engine, but would also decimate its global financial power through a drastic devaluation of its pre-existing investments.

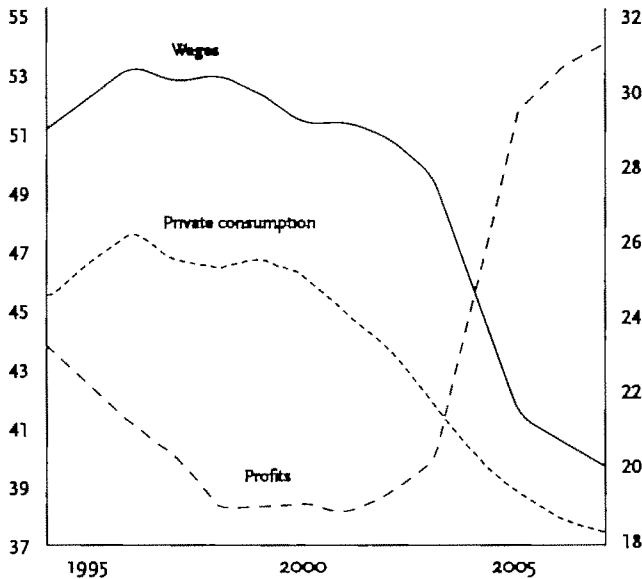
Prior to the current crisis, the Chinese government had been experimenting with different ways to diversify and increase returns on its foreign-reserve holdings. It had tried investing in foreign equities and financing state-owned companies' acquisitions of transnational corporations, but nearly all attempts ended in embarrassing failures.

These were less the result of bad investment decisions than of constraints imposed by the exceptional size of China's foreign reserves, which make it difficult for Beijing to move in and out of certain financial assets freely without disrupting global markets. At the same time, Chinese purchases of major foreign companies remain likely to prompt a protectionist or nationalist backlash. As a result, China's overseas acquisitions have mostly been declining businesses desperately in search of buyers. These obstacles to diversifying its holdings were evident in the unprofitable 2005 purchase of IBM's PC business by Lenovo, a major computer corporation affiliated with the Chinese government; the massive loss incurred by the 2007 investment in Blackstone by the China Investment Corporation, the PRC's sovereign wealth fund; and the upsurge of anti-Chinese sentiment in Australia triggered by the 2009 attempt by Chinalco, a giant state-owned resource company, to raise significantly its stake in Rio Tinto, Australia's biggest mining company. China's stockpiling of imported petroleum and other commodities, to hedge against rising raw-material prices, also brought substantial losses when their prices plummeted in the wake of the global downturn.

Besides exposing the country to the vicissitudes of global markets, China's export-oriented model has drastically curtailed consumption. As noted earlier, the PRC's export competitiveness has been built upon long-term wage stagnation, which arose in turn from an agrarian crisis under an urban-biased policy regime. Rather than sharing a greater part of profits with employees and raising their living standards, the thriving export sector has turned most of its surplus into enterprise savings, which now constitute a large proportion of aggregate national savings. As Figure 7 (opposite) shows, from the late 1990s onwards total wages declined as a share of GDP, in tandem with a fall in private consumption. These two downward trends contrast starkly with the mounting scale of corporate profits. Although consumption has been rising in absolute terms, it has grown far more slowly than investment (see Figure 8, overleaf).

This curtailment of private consumption has not only made it difficult for domestic-oriented firms to run down their inventories, it has also brought frustrations for many foreign businesses with high expectations of China's supposedly gigantic market. Though already established as a significant buyer of capital goods, manufactured components and natural resources from Japan, Southeast Asia, Brazil and elsewhere, China has yet to actualize much of its potential as a key importer of consumer

FIGURE 7. Wages, profits and private consumption as a percentage of GDP



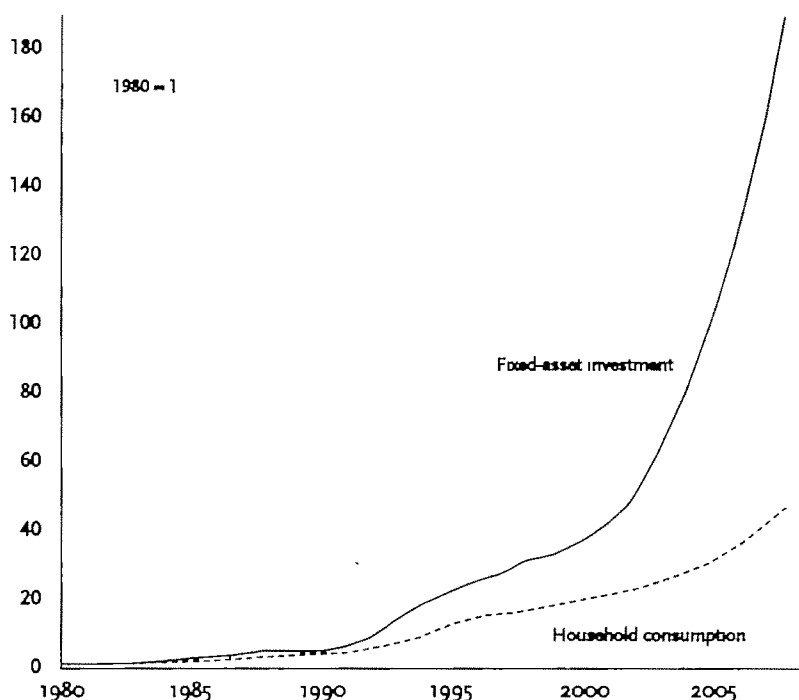
Left scale: wage and compensation levels; right scale: profit levels.
Source: China Statistical Yearbook

goods from the developed and industrializing world alike. The *Economist* complained on behalf of these disheartened foreign investors that 'the market will turn out to be smaller than expected and take longer to develop; and because so many foreign businesses are piling in, competition is likely to be fierce . . . How can foreign firms generate acceptable returns in China?'⁷ In similar vein, when it turned out that Chinese demand for automobiles had grown much more slowly than the sector's production capacity, *Forbes* magazine recognized that 'rising competition in China has led to manufacturing overcapacity and a rapid decline in car makers' profit margins there to a level largely in line with the rest of the world, at 4 to 6 per cent'.⁸

In an attempt to initiate a rebalancing of China's development—characterized by Premier Wen Jiabao in 2007 as 'unstable, unbalanced, uncoordinated and unsustainable'—the central government under

⁷ 'A billion three, but not for me', *Economist*, 18 March 2004.

⁸ 'Speed Bumps for Automakers in China, India', *Forbes*, 26 March 2007.

FIGURE 8. *Growth index of investment and consumption, 1980–2008*

Source: China Data Center.

Hu Jintao and his 'populist' allies had tried from 2005 to fuel domestic consumption by boosting the disposable income of peasants and urban workers. The first wave of such initiatives included the abolition of agricultural taxes and a rise in government procurement prices for agricultural products. Though these measures to raise rural living standards were no more than a small step in the right direction, their effect was instantaneous. Slightly improved conditions in the rural-agricultural sector slowed the flow of migration to the cities, and a sudden labour shortage and wage hike in the coastal export-processing zones ensued, inducing many economists to declare that the Lewisian Turning Point—at which rural surplus labour has been exhausted—had finally arrived.⁹

⁹ Cai Fang and Du Yang, eds, *The China Population and Labor Yearbook*, vol. 1, Leiden 2009.

FIGURE 9. *Annual real percentage growth in retail sales, 1986–2008*

Source: China Data Center.

Just as China's 'unlimited' supply of labour was more a consequence of policy than a natural precondition of its development, the arrival of the Lewisian Turning Point was in fact the outcome of state attempts to reverse a previous urban bias rather than of a process driven by the market's invisible hand. The concomitant to rising peasant income and industrial wages was unprecedented, soaring retail sales, even controlled for inflation (see Figure 9). But no sooner had the government taken its first step toward domestic consumption-driven growth than vested interests in the coastal export sector complained loudly about their worsening prospects. They asked for compensating policies to safeguard their competitiveness, and attempted to sabotage further initiatives to raise the living standards of the working classes, such as the New Labour Contract Law—which would increase workers' remuneration and make firing them more difficult—and the managed appreciation of the yuan.

When the global crisis struck and China's export engine stalled, the PRC immediately rolled out a mega-fiscal-stimulus package amounting to US \$570 billion (including both government spending and targeted loans from state-owned banks) in November 2008. Many initially celebrated this massive intervention as a precious opportunity to accelerate the rebalancing of the Chinese economy towards domestic consumption, and expected that the stimulus would consist principally of social spending—such as financing for medical insurance and social-security accounts—which could further raise the disposable income and hence purchasing power of the working classes. However, no more than 20 per cent of the stimulus package was in fact allocated to social spending; the large majority went to fixed-asset investment in sectors already plagued by overcapacity, such as steel and cement, and in the construction of the world's biggest high-speed rail system, whose profitability and utility are uncertain.¹⁰ Without providing much assistance to social-welfare institutions or small and medium labour-intensive enterprises, the stimulus package will generate only limited improvements in disposable income and employment. Worse, the central government, seemingly horrified by the sudden collapse of the export sector, retreated from its rebalancing efforts and resumed a number of export-promotion measures, such as rebates on value-added taxes on exports and halting the appreciation of the yuan. Manufacturers in these sectors even made use of the crisis to call for a suspension of the 2007 New Labour Contract Law for the sake of their survival.¹¹

Despite its impressive size, the fiscal stimulus will do little to promote domestic consumption and hence reduce China's export dependence. Though a large quantity of funds was directed to the Western provinces to redress the development gap between coastal and inland areas, the mostly capital-intensive, urban-oriented growth promoted by the stimulus has actually aggravated the rural–urban polarization (see Table 3). While the heavy urban bias of fixed-asset investment continued, the urban–rural gap in income growth, which narrowed after 2005, widened again under the stimulus. This has put a brake on the relative rise in rural living standards since 2005, which had helped fuel modest growth in domestic consumption.

¹⁰ 'Siwanyi neiwai' [Inside and outside of the four thousand billion], *Caijing*, 16 March 2009.

¹¹ See 'Jiuye xingshi yanjun laodong hetong fa chujing ganga' [Severe unemployment jeopardizes labour contract law], *Caijing*, 4 January 2009.

TABLE 3. *Persistent urban bias and falling profitability under the stimulus*

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Urban–rural ratio in fixed-asset investment	5.6	5.7	5.9	6.1	5.9*
Urban–rural gap in real per capita income growth (%)	3.4	3	2.7	0.4	3.1*
Profit growth in industrial establishment	17.4	31	36.7	4.9	–10.6†

* Figures based on first six months of 2009.

† Figure represents growth in first eight months upon same period of preceding year.

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China.

What the massive spending actually does is to keep the economy roaring with a state-led investment spurt in the short run, while waiting for the export market to turn around. By the summer of 2009, data showed that the stimulus had successfully halted the free fall of the Chinese economy and fostered a modest rebound. But at the same time, nearly 90 per cent of GDP growth in the first seven months of 2009 was driven solely by fixed-asset investments fuelled by a loan explosion and increased government spending.²³ Many of these investments are inefficient and generally unprofitable (see Table 3). If the turnaround of the export market does not come in time, the fiscal deficit, non-performing loans and the exacerbation of overcapacity will generate a deeper downturn in the medium term. In the words of a prominent Chinese economist, this mega-stimulus programme is like ‘drinking poison to quench a thirst’.²⁴

Prospects

Over the course of the last two decades, China has emerged as the final assembler and exporter in an East Asian network of production. It has also attained the status of largest creditor to the US and largest holder of

²³ ‘Zhongguo GDP zengzhang jin 90% you touzi ladong’ [Nearly 90 per cent of China’s GDP growth was driven by investment], *Caijing*, 16 July 2009.

²⁴ Xu Xiaonian of the China Europe International Business School in Shanghai, quoted in ‘China Stimulus Plan Comes Under Attack at “Summer Davos”’, *China Post*, 13 September 2009.

foreign reserves, and demonstrated the potential to become the market of the world in addition to being its workshop. China is thus well poised to carve out a new regional and global economic order by helping Asia and the global South to move out of their market and financial dependence on the North in general and the US in particular.

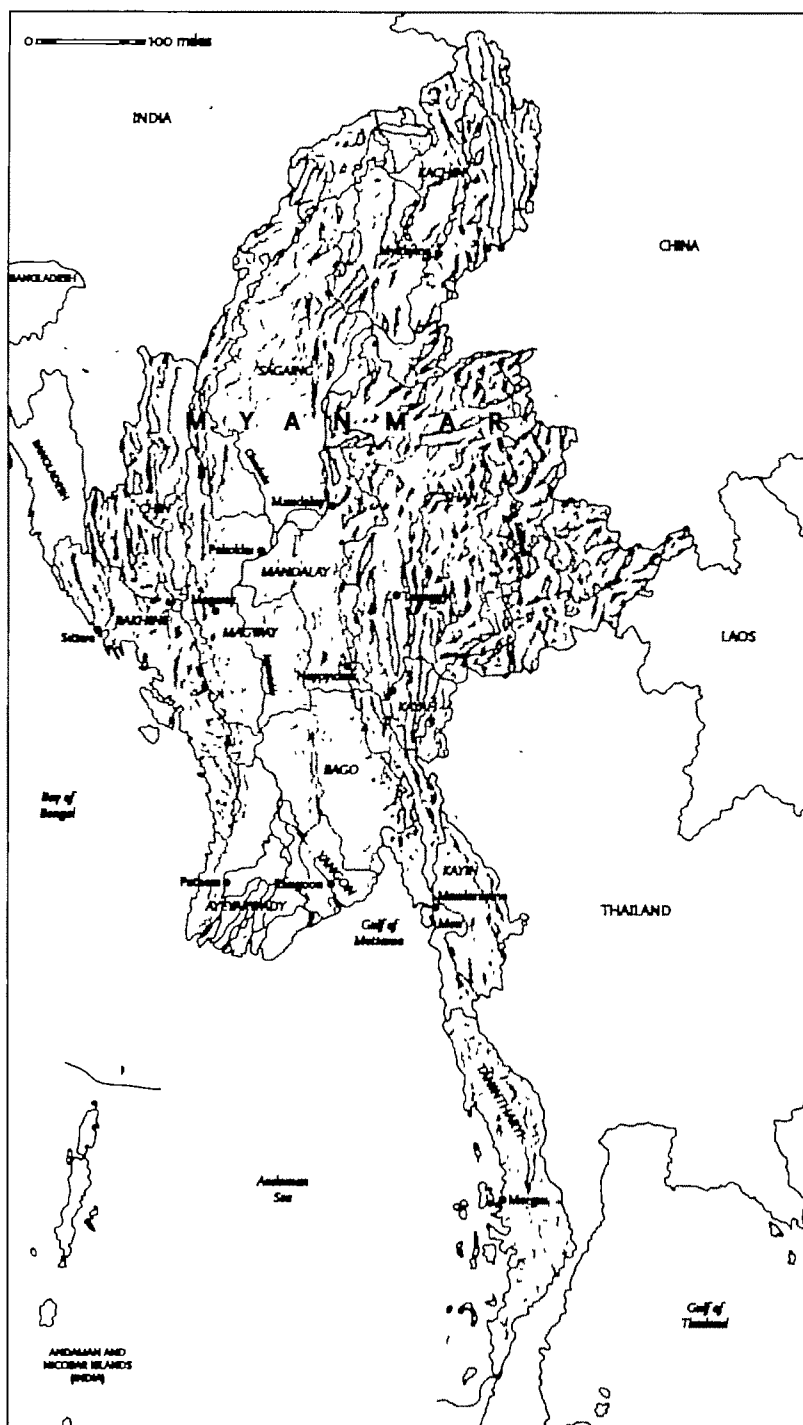
China's potential to lead, however, is far from being actualized. So far, the PRC's strategy of lending to the US to facilitate purchases of Chinese exports has only deepened China's, as well as its suppliers', dependence on American consumers and the US bond market, making them vulnerable to any turbulence in the global economy. The PRC's long-term export competitiveness is rooted in a developmental approach that bankrupts the countryside and prolongs the unlimited supply of low-cost migrant labour to coastal export industries. The resultant ever-increasing trade surplus may inflate China's global financial power, in the form of expanded holdings of US debt, but the long-term suppression of wages restrains the growth of China's consumption power. The current financial crisis, which has decimated consumer demand in the global North and increased the likelihood of a collapse of the US bond market and the dollar, is a belated wake-up call for an urgent change of course.

Beijing is well aware that further accumulation of foreign reserves is counterproductive, since it would increase the risk associated with the assets China already holds or else induce a shift to ever riskier ones. The government is also very aware of the need to reduce the country's export dependence and stimulate the growth of domestic demand by increasing the working classes' disposable income. Such a redirection of priorities has to involve moving resources and policy preferences away from the coastal cities to the rural hinterland, where protracted social marginalization and underconsumption have left ample room for improvement. But the vested interests that have taken root over several decades of export-led development make this a daunting task. Officials and entrepreneurs from the coastal provinces, who have become a powerful group capable of shaping the formation and implementation of central government policies, are so far adamant in their resistance to any such reorientation. This dominant faction of China's elite, as exporters and creditors to the world economy, has established a symbiotic relation with the American ruling class, which has striven to maintain its domestic hegemony by securing the living standards of US citizens,

as consumers and debtors to the world. Despite occasional squabbles, the two elite groups on either side of the Pacific share an interest in perpetuating their respective domestic status quos, as well as the current imbalance in the global economy.

Unless there is a fundamental political realignment that shifts the balance of power from the coastal urban elite to forces that represent rural grassroots interests, China is likely to continue leading other Asian exporters in diligently serving—and being held hostage by—the US. The Anglo-Saxon establishment has recently become more respectful towards its Asian partners, inviting China to become a ‘stakeholder’ in a ‘ChiAmerican’ global order, or ‘G2’. What they mean is that China should not rock the boat, but should continue to help maintain American economic dominance (in return, perhaps, for more consideration of Beijing’s concerns over Tibet and Taiwan). This would enable Washington to buy precious time to secure its command over emergent sectors of the world economy through debt-financed government investment in green technology and other innovations, and hence remake its ailing supremacy into a green hegemony. This seems to be exactly what the Obama administration is betting on as its long-term response to the global crisis and declining American power.

If China were to re-orient its developmental model and achieve greater balance between domestic consumption and exports, it could not only free itself from dependence on the collapsing US consumer market and addiction to risky US debt, but also benefit manufacturers in other Asian economies that are equally eager to escape these dangers. More importantly, if other emerging economies were to pursue a similar re-orientation and South–South trade were to deepen, then they could become one another’s consumers, ushering in a new age of autonomous and equitable growth in the global South. Until that happens, however, a recentring of global capitalism from West to East and from North to South in the aftermath of the global crisis remains little more than wishful thinking.



MARY CALLAHAN

MYANMAR'S PERPETUAL JUNTA

Solving the Riddle of the Tatmadaw's Long Reign

THE IMMINENT FALL of Myanmar's brutal and kleptocratic military dictatorship has been proclaimed on numerous occasions over the past twenty years. The mass protests of 1988, which saw the emergence of Aung San Suu Kyi as the figure-head of the pro-reform forces, came just two years after the success of 'people power' in ousting the Marcos regime in the Philippines, and seemed at first destined for similar success; but within twelve months the movement had succumbed to splits and repression. Suu Kyi's arrest in July 1989 came on the eve of the Hungarian border opening, prelude to the velvet revolutions of the ex-Soviet bloc; but 'third wave' democracy swept by, leaving Myanmar untouched. In 1996–98 when, after sustained lobbying by human-rights groups, the EU and US imposed formal economic sanctions on General Than Shwe's regime, the move was hailed as another turning point: it was hoped that sustained international pressure might succeed where popular mobilization had failed, with South Africa considered a template for forcing reform in Myanmar. But by then, the junta was reaping massive profits from teak, jade and ruby deals with its neighbours, and shrugged the sanctions off. Well-funded attempts by George Soros, the National Endowment for Democracy and others to build an opposition movement among Burmese exiles produced scant internal effects. The dictatorship survived one well-documented human-rights report after another, as well as denunciations by world leaders, Nobel laureates and Hollywood celebrities.¹

In September 2007 the exhilaration of the 'march of the monks' and the mass protests once again seemed to herald the beginning of the end. Now it was the power of the new media that was hailed, as bloggers,

students and relatives of the Burmese diaspora flooded the internet with cellphone images and optimistic predictions, amplified by the foreign press corps. Within a week, however, the government crackdown had dispersed the protests, while cellphone democracy fell prey to network jamming. Eight months later, on 2 May 2008, Cyclone Nargis swept through the Irrawaddy Delta killing as many as 200,000 people, most of whom were very poor farmers, fishermen and labourers living in thatch or bamboo huts that provided no protection. Once again there were activist and media pronouncements that the junta would never survive the blow. With two supply-laden US warships patrolling its coast and 24/7 international media coverage of the desperate plight of the cyclone victims, there were high hopes that Myanmar's military could no longer refuse entry to Western relief workers, whose presence was now judged essential if the regime were ever to change. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon travelled to Myanmar on May 22 and won visas for dozens of foreign relief experts in exchange for millions of dollars of emergency aid.² The catastrophe did permit some of the international NGOs to scale up their operations, although government checkpoints continued to act as chokepoints for aid, and the junta continued undaunted.

For the international media and many of Aung San Suu Kyi's supporters in the West, the reason for the Burmese regime's staying power is quite simple: repression. Thus the September 2007 crackdown on the 'march of the monks' was portrayed as turning Myanmar's major cities into 'vast killing fields'.³ In fact, most of the brutality was centred on Rangoon and

² I use the terms Burma/Burmese and Myanmar interchangeably for the country/population. The former, which probably dates back to the last dynasty before colonial rule, derives from the majority ethnic group, the Burmans; the latter, a literary form, first appears in 12th-century inscriptions. In 1989, the toponym's romanization was changed to Myanmar by the ruling junta, with corresponding revisions for cities and ethnic groups (a move comparable to China's introduction of the *pinyin* system). Usage of pre-1989 names became a litmus test for certain exile and advocacy groups in the 1990s. Today the new names are widely used inside the country and some minority leaders prefer Myanmar, as less associated with the Burmans (now renamed 'Bamars'). Currently, the US, UK, Canada and Australia insist on 'Burma', while much of Europe, Russia, Japan and all the country's near neighbours—India, Bangladesh, China, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos—use Myanmar.

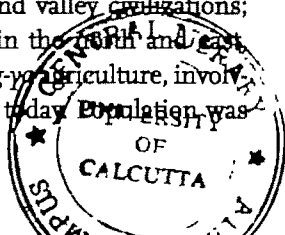
³ The regime has some grounds for suspicion. See Andrew Selth, 'Even Paranoids Have Enemies: Cyclone Nargis and Myanmar's Fears of Invasion', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 30, no. 3, December 2008.

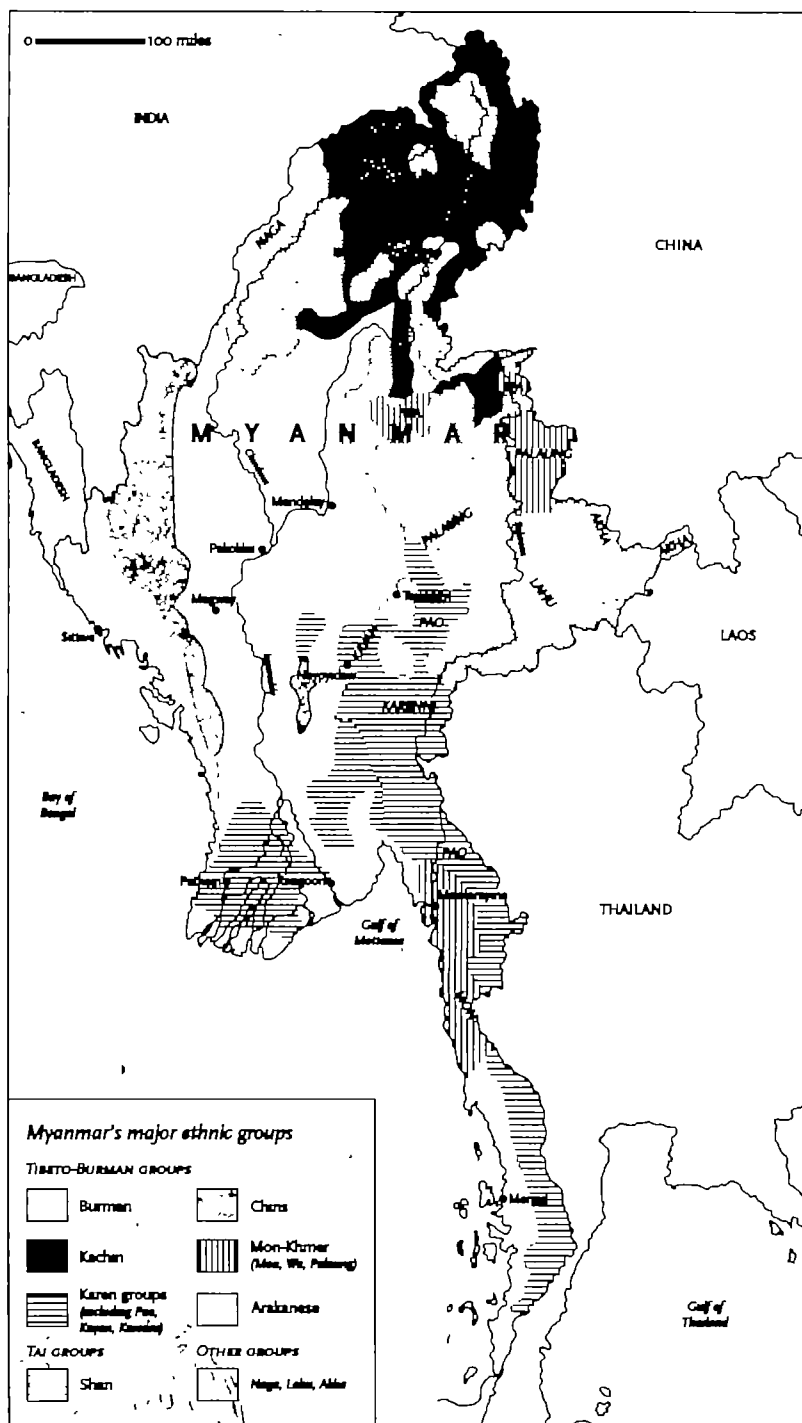
⁴ See Kyaw Yin Hlaing, 'Challenging the Authoritarian State: Buddhist Monks and Peaceful Protests in Burma', *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2008.

the death toll was around 30 or 40, as compared to media estimates of hundreds, or even thousands. That is not to suggest that the repression was insignificant: some of the leading activists were sentenced to 65 years in prison, although it is hoped they will not serve that long; and the government's *Swan Arr Shin* militia—the name means ‘masters of strength’—are well-trained thugs, who operate with impunity alongside uniformed riot-control army and police units. But repression alone cannot explain the regime’s persistence. Far more murderous dictatorships—Suharto in Indonesia, Marcos in the Philippines—have been overthrown, as well as far better-policed ones, in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, the GDR. The Myanmar government has little to compare with the coercive apparatuses of these, yet it has outlived them all. A more satisfactory explanation of its resilience may be gained by examining the origins of the regime, in the anti-colonial movement against British rule and Japan’s war-time occupation of Southeast Asia, and its relation to Burma’s multi-ethnic, mainly Buddhist society. This in turn requires an examination of the pre-colonial social structures on which British rule was definitively imposed in 1886, and of the peculiarities of British Burma’s treatment within the Empire. For it was during the colonial period that the foundations were laid for the centralized yet highly differentiated spatial logic of power, in equal parts repressive and divisive, that continues to define the Burmese polity today.

Palace and pagoda

Any analysis of Myanmar’s political history must reckon with the overwhelming facts of its physical geography. The country covers over a quarter of a million square miles—around the size of Texas and significantly larger than, say, Afghanistan. It is riven by three north–south mountain ranges: one on each flank, and a third running up the centre; each presenting formidable obstacles to east–west travel, trade and interaction. Three major rivers also run north–south: the Salween in the east, the Irrawaddy in the centre, and the Chindwin in the northwest; for centuries these provided the only reliable means of transport. In pre-colonial times, ecology—hence, mode of agriculture—was the most significant determinant of social organization in this densely forested region. The principal distinction was between hill peoples and valley civilizations; the former—among them Kachins and Karens in the north and east, Arakanese and Chins in the west—practised *taung-yong* agriculture, involving crop-rotation and slash-and-burn, still in use today. Population was





sparser in the hills, spirituality more animist, languages more diverse.⁴ In the more densely settled valleys and on the eastern plateau, Mons, Burmans and Shan practised irrigated paddy cultivation and developed more complex social and political systems, building cities notable for their luxurious palaces and temples in this land of villages.

Various kingdoms co-existed at different times in the region during the pre-colonial period, among them that of the Mons of southeastern Burma, entry point for Indian Buddhism from the 3rd century BC, the Arakanese on the Gulf of Bengal and the Burmans of the central Irrawaddy. From their capital Ava, near Mandalay, Burman kings established the first 'empire' over the multitude of different linguistic and cultural groups in the territory between the 11th and 13th centuries.⁵ The basis of Burman rule lay in control over foreign trade and appropriation of rice surpluses from the central Irrawaddy valley; the war booty—slaves—was used to build irrigation works, temples and palaces. Political power was highly personalistic, defined by relationships of obligation to rulers and overlords rather than jurisdictional control over territory; indeed remote villages and towns were often subject to claims for labour and taxes from multiple suzerains. Burman kings were also the chief patrons of the Buddhist orders and monasteries, supporting monastic schools and constructing pagodas to improve their karma. Favoured *hpongyis*, or monks, were often key advisors at court.⁶ In addition to the state–*sangha* nexus, the local *myothugyis*, or hereditary village leaders, played a vital social and administrative role in raising revenues, recruiting troops and supplying labour.

⁴ Edmund Leach, 'The Frontiers of "Burma"', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 3, 1960, pp. 49–68.

⁵ Over the last ten years, sophisticated debates have emerged over many aspects of second millennium history on the Pagan, Pegu, Taungoo and Thaton dynasties. Original sources have been re-examined and reinterpreted, raising fundamental questions about the accepted narratives of Burmese history. See, for example, Michael Aung-Thwin, *The Mists of Ramanna: The Legend that was Lower Burma*, Honolulu 2005.

⁶ Relations between king and *sangha* were complex and often fraught. In times of scarcity, the *sangha* and the monarch competed for control over wealth and labour. Economic hardship sent larger numbers of indigents into monasteries, which reduced the royal tax base and labour force. Corruption in the monkhood provided pretexts for kings to purge the *sangha*. On tensions between state and *sangha*, see Michael Aung-Thwin, *Pagan: The Origins of Modern Burma*, Honolulu, 1985; Victor Lieberman, *Burmese Administrative Cycles: Anarchy and Conquest, c. 1580–1760*, Princeton, NJ 1984.

By the late 18th century, Burman kings had once again staked claims for submission, tribute and slaves throughout much of what constitutes Myanmar today, and proceeded to plunder Arakan (1784), Assam (1817) and Manipur (1819). In doing so, they now threatened to encroach upon East India Company operations in the region. The British responded with shows of force, confidently expecting the kind of accommodation they had achieved with Malay sultans, Indian princes and African tribal leaders. Instead they were met with proud rebuffs from King Bagyidaw (r. 1819–37). With London's backing, the East India Company then turned to outright coercion. In the Anglo-Burmese wars of 1824–26, British forces seized Assam, Manipur, Arakan and what is today Tenasserim in the southeast, on the Andaman coast. Thirty years later, the Company annexed the province of Pegu, or Lower Burma, in the war of 1852–53.

Colonial palimpsest

Had the clash occurred at a time when the Burman monarchy presided over a less expansive realm, the British might have mapped South and Southeast Asia quite differently. As it was, they drew boundaries around territory that hosted one of the world's widest diversities of indigenous populations, in one of the most fractured geographical settings. If the Burmans made up some 60–70 per cent of the population (the modern estimate), the remaining third comprised dozens of distinct ethno-linguistic groups.⁷ Again, a different fate might have awaited the Burmans had they shared the luxury of distance from British India enjoyed by Siam. But where the Siamese kings could turn their domain into a compliant buffer between French and British interests in Southeast Asia, the Burmans had no such option.⁸ Although King Mindon (r. 1852–78) and, to a lesser degree, his son Thibaw (r. 1878–85) sought to counter imperial aggression by modernizing and re-arming the kingdom, London made clear that it would no longer tolerate their defiance. In 1885, a tax dispute was trumped up into a *casus belli*, and the vast superiority of industrial Britain's arms dictated the outcome. With a force of only 9,000 troops, Gen. Henry North Dalrymple Prendergast, a veteran of the campaign that had put down the 1857 Indian Mutiny, succeeded in routing the royal Burmese army in less than a month. By a bureaucratic

⁷ Statistics on ethnic makeup in Burma are inadequate and widely contested: the last systematic national census to include the minority regions was conducted in 1931.

⁸ Thant Myint-U makes this case in his *The Making of Modern Burma*, Cambridge 2001.

fiat that was to have far-reaching consequences, Burma was incorporated into the Raj from 1 January 1886, to be administered as a sub-province of British India, rather than as a separate colony.

What was supposed to be a swift, low-cost 'decapitation' leading to the installation of a more pliant regime soon turned ugly, however. Although young King Thibaw had been sent into exile, a widespread anti-British insurgency now erupted, led by former army officers, princes and village chiefs. By February 1887 more than 40,000 British and Indian troops were fighting a brutal pacification campaign against cells of resistance fighters in nearly every district of Upper and Lower Burma. By one estimate, in many of the plains villages practically every household had some male member fighting with the rebels.⁹ The British response was predictably brutal. Indian Army units had orders to shoot anyone suspected of possessing arms; they burned or forcibly relocated villages, and conducted public floggings and mass executions of alleged rebels.¹⁰

As part of the pacification process, a more 'rational' system of administration was imposed on central and lower Burma through the 1887 Village Act.¹¹ At a stroke the British abolished the centuries-old practices of social regulation. The village *myothugyis* were abruptly dismissed and *hpongyis* sidelined under the new dispensation. Geographically determined administrative districts would henceforth be policed, taxed and ruled by a new layer of administrative personnel, mostly brought over

⁹ John Cady, *History of Modern Burma*, Ithaca 1958, p. 133. Thant Myint-U notes that more troops were deployed here than in 'either the Crimean War or in the occupation of Egypt just a few years before': *River of Lost Footsteps*, New York 2006, p. 28.

¹⁰ One regimental history defended these tactics: 'In practically all engagements with the enemy we had to fight an invisible foe. The *dacots* waylaid our troops as they came up the river in boats or by road marches, poured forth a heavy fire upon the advancing forces as they got within range. Not only was it difficult to locate the enemy in their hidden lairs, but our men laboured under the vast disadvantage of having to force their way through the close undergrowth of an unknown forest, whilst the enemy knew all the ins and outs of their tangled labyrinths and were able to keep concealed . . . Our only means of punishment was to burn these villages.' Sir Reginald Hennell, *Famous Indian Regiment*, New Delhi 1927 (reprint 1985), p. 134.

¹¹ See the account by the first Chief Commissioner of Burma: Charles Crosthwaite, *Pacification of Burma*, London 1912 (1968). See also Daw Mya Sein, *Sir Charles Crosthwaite and the Administration of British Burma*, Rangoon 1938, and the brilliant (if romantic) critique of Crosthwaite's system by scholar-bureaucrat J. S. Furnivall in *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India*, Cambridge 1948.

from Madras, Bengal and other parts of India. The result, naturally, was increased support for the insurgency, while the radical demotion of the *sangha* ensured that monks were among the most vocal early critics of the colonial regime, able to call upon deep reserves of moral authority.¹² In the end, famine helped to weaken the Burmese resistance, although small bands of fighters would vex the British Indian Army for another decade. But the more lasting effect of the butchery and repression was to eliminate the possibility of installing the normal mechanisms of semi-indirect imperial rule through pliable local elites, such as the princely satraps who served the British so well in India. Instead, a brutal and intrusive form of direct rule was imposed on a complex social order about which the conquerors were particularly ill-informed.

Or so it was in lower and central Burma. For purposes of bureaucratic simplification and fiscal cheese-paring, the British partitioned the country into two zones. 'Ministerial Burma' or 'Burma Proper', encompassing the maritime regions, the centre and the Irrawaddy Delta, was governed directly by employees of the British state.¹³ The second zone juridically designated by the new rulers comprised the 'Frontier' or 'Excluded' areas: the hilly regions running up to the borders of the country. This territory was populated by a wide range of smallish ethnic groups, including Shans, Karenni, Chins and Kachins. Here, the British relied entirely on traditional rulers, such as Shan *sawbwas* and Kachin *duwas*; but unlike in the princely states of India, few British officials were ever posted in the Frontier Areas. There were concrete economic reasons for this categorization: the difficulty of the terrain meant that the costs of providing infrastructure—roads, bridges, tunnels, rails—in areas of sizeable settlements would be colossal; while the low population density of the mountain peoples would also have made direct rule hard. Yet no other Asian colony suffered such a radical bifurcation in its population's fate. Vietnam, Malaya, the Philippines and Indonesia all had 'indirectly ruled zones', and the Indonesian archipelago had many more ethnic groups than Burma; but the 'mountain zones' among these were strategically unimportant and thinly populated, mainly by 'tribals'. The peculiarity

¹² In the next generation, charismatic monks such as U Ottama and U Wisara led revivalist movements in the rural areas, aiming to rescue Buddhism from British oppression. They were imprisoned by the British and are remembered as martyrs (in 1924 and 1930, respectively) of the national cause.

¹³ Most of the population of this zone was Burman, and predominantly Buddhist; the rest consisted of Karens, Indians, Chinese, Mons and others.

of Burma lay in the sheer size of the special zones, and their strategic locations—next to India, China, Thailand, Laos—along the longest land frontier in Southeast Asia.

Skewed modernization

For the next fifty years, 'Burma Proper' was developed as an administrative adjunct to British India. Many hundreds of thousands of Indian immigrants, as well as Christianized Karens and Anglo-Burmans—but, importantly, very few Burmans—were employed to construct, at break-neck pace, roads, bridges, banks, railways, telegraph and later telephone lines; and to staff schools, colleges, police and militia units.⁴ British trading houses dominated the most lucrative sectors of the economy, including the export of rice, teak, gemstones and oil; internal trade and small-scale processing of agricultural produce were largely in the hands of Chinese and Indians. The British oversaw extensive engineering works to drain and clear the swampy Irrawaddy Delta for rice production—comparable to the endeavours of the French in transforming the Mekong, or the Dutch in the alluvial plains of Java—relocating over 300,000 farmers from Upper Burma in the process. The largely subsistence economy of the pre-colonial era was now engulfed by the demands of agricultural commodity production with rice as a chief export, mainly to India. Competition drove up prices for land, food and imported consumer goods, while the interest rates for credit at the start of planting season proved ruinous for many village farmers. When they lost their land to (usually South Indian) money-lenders, impoverished Burmese farmers competed with Indian labour for manual work in the delta and Rangoon regions. Market pressures resulted in growing landlessness, indebtedness and desperation; early 20th-century Rangoon had the highest crime rates in the Empire. The response of the colonial authorities was to expand army and police forces, and impose stiff penalties not only on the accused but also on their families.

In the field of education, the British sidelined the monastic schools, which had set regional standards in the pre-colonial era, in favour of Anglo-vernacular and missionary schools; these tended to attract a higher proportion of non-Burman groups, such as the Christianized

⁴ Kingsley Davis estimated that a total of 2.5 million Indians migrated to Burma during the colonial period: *The Population of India and Pakistan*, New York 1968, p. 101.

Karen.¹⁵ One compensation for the inclusion of Burma in British India, however, was the development of higher education: Rangoon College was founded in 1878 as an affiliate of Calcutta University, and became a full-fledged university in 1920. By the 1930s the campus had become a hotbed of anti-colonialist agitation; it was here that a new layer of Burmese leaders would be formed, among them such figures as U Nu, Aung San, Kyaw Nyein (later deputy prime minister) and Thein Pe, later leader of the Communist Party of Burma.¹⁶ They took over the stodgy Rangoon University Student Union, formerly a social club for the sons of government officers, and transformed it into a militant campaigning body. The nationwide Dobama Asiayone, or 'Our Burma Association', formed in 1930, was distinctly to the left of the Indian National Congress (and on occasion, stridently anti-Indian). Aiming to promote unionization and worker-peasant solidarity, it was in the forefront of the strikes and demonstrations of the time. Many Dobama members bestowed upon themselves the honorific *thakin*, meaning 'master', in repudiation of colonial deference and to show themselves rulers in their own country. At the same time, London began restructuring its colonial administration, under pressure from the Congress Party in India, creating openings for an older, more conservative cohort of Burmese politicians and lawyers, some of them trained in London. In 1935 elections were held for a native Burmese legislature, to serve under the British Governor-General. Ba Maw became its first prime minister.

In sum: the period of British colonial rule was, by comparison to India, Ceylon or Malaya, relatively short—a little over fifty years. But its impact on Burmese society was far more destructive. It decisively weakened traditional elites, through the repression of the Burman resistance, overthrow of the *myothugyi* system and marginalization of the monks; and instituted a structural division of the population on ethnic grounds in relation to the central power, whose instruments of repression—police and military—were predominantly staffed by Indians or Christian minorities. Modernization, too, depended on the importation of a large sub-clientele of allogeneic money-lenders and petty bureaucrats, often a target for the nationalist movement. Economic development

¹⁵ J. S. Furnivall pointed out that before the Third Anglo-Burmese War in 1885–86, Burma had far more children at school than any other country in 'the tropical Far East': *Colonial Policy and Practice*, p. 211.

¹⁶ Ne Win, who would run the country from 1962 until 1988, also attended Rangoon University but flunked out in 1931. After failing to break into the charcoal market, he found a job as a postal clerk.

skewed towards cheap commodity exports devastated the subsistence village economy. Such was the British legacy in Burma on the eve of the Japanese invasion.

Japanese occupation

With the outbreak of World War Two, Burmese anti-colonialists, like many Indian nationalists, looked to London's enemies as potential allies and liberators. In 1939 the Freedom Bloc, an alliance of the Dobama Asiayone, monks, students and older nationalists, issued a call for an uprising. The British responded with mass arrests and brutal repression. In 1940, the 25-year-old *thakin* Aung San, a wanted man, escaped on a Norwegian freighter to Amoy. Having co-founded the Communist Party of Burma a year earlier, he planned to make contact with the Chinese Communist Party. Instead, it was the Japanese Kempeitai (secret police) who discovered him. He was flown to Japan, where he worked with intelligence forces to draw up his 'Blueprint for a Free Burma'. Aung San secretly re-entered Rangoon on a Japanese freighter to recruit 29 other young anti-colonialist leaders. The 'Thirty Comrades' were then taken to Hainan, given six months' military training—command, combat, espionage, guerrilla warfare, political tactics—and formed into the Burma Independence Army. In early 1942, as British rule collapsed in ignominy before the Japanese advance through Hong Kong, Malaya, Thailand and Singapore, Aung San's BIA accompanied the Japanese 15th Army on its lightning conquest of Burma. British officials fled west in disarray, harried by their former subjects. With them went over 500,000 Indian refugees, mostly travelling on foot. The BIA proceeded to recruit a (mainly Burman) guerrilla force some 20,000 strong.⁷

Over the next three years Burma suffered a scale of destruction even greater than that of the Philippines as bitter inter-imperialist warfare raged back and forth across the country, with supply chains on both sides repeatedly stretched to breaking point. The retreating British had destroyed crops, bridges, roads, schools, markets, rice mills and hospitals. The Japanese established an 'independent' Burmese government in 1943, reinstalling the ever-helpful Ba Maw as prime minister. Aung San, as minister of war, was in charge of the Burma

⁷ Official Burmese sources estimate a figure of 50,000: see, for example, Maung Maung, *Burma's Constitution*, The Hague 1961, p. 55, and *Tatmadaw History, 1824-1945*, Rangoon 1994, vol. 1, chapter 5 [in Burmese].

National Army. He and other young activists also retained the leadership of the semi-clandestine anti-colonialist networks, chief among them Aung San's People's Revolutionary Party and the Communist Party of Burma, whose leader Than Tun, Aung San's brother-in-law, served as minister for agriculture, although most CPB cadres were underground. Meanwhile in the mountainous 'Excluded Areas' US and British special forces, regrouped by the Allies in 1943 under the South East Asia Command, now worked to arm Kachin, Shan, Chin and other indigenous levies against Japan and its Burman allies.¹⁸ In March 1945, with the end of the war in sight, Aung San's PRP and the CPB turned on the Japanese, and joined with SEAC forces to defeat the now-retreating Imperial army. They constituted the principal power in the devastated country when the British forces returned.

Post-war order

On the eve of independence, the *thakins* were confronted with a country in ruins. Three years of Allied bombing raids, followed by the earth-scorching of the departing Japanese army, left Rangoon in rubble, Mandalay flattened and most provincial towns in shambles. The harvest had been destroyed and famine loomed. Displaced guerrillas, uprooted villagers and urban refugees struggled to survive, as did the armed ethnic-minority levies raised by the Allies. In contrast to rubber-rich, strategically located Malaya, the British had little incentive to bear the costs of Burma's reconstruction; nor, thanks to their own conquests, was there a collaborationist landed oligarchy that could be resuscitated—as in the Philippines, by a decisive MacArthur—after the war. Nevertheless, the British were determined, as in India and Pakistan, to leave their imprint on the post-colonial Burmese state and armed forces while rewarding the groups that had served them most closely, as a basis for future influence. Just as they had governed Burma on the cheap, so they now aimed for a cut-price post-colonial solution: a commanding role for British-trained Karen officers in the Burmese Army; continuing UK military presence; a federalist constitution, guaranteeing representation for the Karens and other minorities; and the exclusion of the CPB.

The political and ideological assets of the young *thakins* included a world outlook substantially framed by Second International socialism; the

* Andrew Selth, 'Race and Resistance in Burma, 1942–1945', *Modern Asian Studies*, xx, 1986, pp. 483–507.

impress of Japanese military training and discipline; an unwavering faith in 'progress' and modernity; and—as the Cold War began—a militantly neutralist foreign policy. In January 1947 Aung San and Attlee signed an initial independence agreement, largely on Attlee's terms, although Aung San declared that Burma would reject membership of the British Commonwealth, and thus not recognize George VI as formal head of state (the only former colony to do so until 1968, when tiny Aden followed suit). Independence was scheduled for the following January, six months later than India and Pakistan. On 19 July 1947, while negotiations were still under way, Aung San and five colleagues from the interim Cabinet were assassinated, apparently at the behest of their political rival, U Saw. It was thus U Nu, one of the older pre-war *thakins*, who became the first Burmese Prime Minister, while General Smith Dun, a British-trained Karen Christian, was appointed Army Chief of Staff.

The immediate upshot was the outbreak of fighting as the CPB, excluded from power by the Attlee agreement, repudiated the British deal and called for a national uprising, the expropriation of foreign assets and expulsion of (overwhelmingly Indian and Chinese) landlords and business proprietors. Nu called on the army to put down Communist-led risings in Pyay, Thayetmyo and Pinyinmana. Within a few months of independence, however, the Burmese armed forces had split—the second fateful outcome of the British settlement. Karen domination of the top brass and their coziness with the British Services Mission was intolerable to the surviving *thakin* leadership, not least Ne Win, who arranged for the discharge of the Karen officer corps. The result was a mass defection of battle-hardened Karens to an insurgency that would last into the 21st century, leaving the Burma Army with fewer than 2,000 men. The young state now faced an increasing array of armed rebels in the border regions, including CIA-backed remnants of the defeated Kuomintang.

To meet these threats, the armed forces were rapidly expanded. Under the command of General Ne Win and his comrades from the wartime Fourth Burma Rifles, the *tatmadaw* ('armed forces') was remodelled as a British-style professional military, with an integrated vertical command structure and effective logistical support. In the process it was also set on a course in which no ethnic-minority officer would again achieve a significant leadership role. By the late 1950s, the competence of the army stood in marked contrast to the growing paralysis of the civil service and

the factionalism both within and between ruling and opposition parties, which at times descended into violence.

The first decade of independence saw a number of achievements: towns were rebuilt after the war-time devastation and the country's infrastructure improved. Rangoon was one of the most modern cities in Southeast Asia. As Prime Minister, Nu—a caustic anti-colonial social critic, novelist and playwright, who saw himself as Burma's answer to George Bernard Shaw—propounded a neutralist foreign policy, a highly optimistic economic plan devised by US consultants enamoured with the New Deal, and a populist Buddhism which he managed to embody in his own person.¹⁹ His vision never extended far beyond the Buddhist Burman heartlands, however. The contrast between Nu and Sukarno, his contemporary in post-Independence Indonesia, is instructive. Sukarno spent the 1950s assiduously travelling the archipelago to forge a common national identity while the multi-ethnic uprising against the Dutch was still fresh in living memory. In Myanmar, anti-colonial Burman forces had been pitted against SEAC-backed minority guerrillas for much of the war; they had fought alongside Kachin, Chin and other frontier levies against the Japanese only for a few months after March 1945. Upon the British reoccupation of Rangoon in May of that year, what little common cause connected the different peoples in Burma quickly receded. The problem of bridging historically exacerbated ethnic and religious differences was never a priority for the Nu government in the 1950s. Minority politicians, who had been promised federalist concessions in return for their support of a unitary constitution, chafed at their political marginalization and demanded greater autonomy. Students, too, held frequent anti-government protests.

Ne Win's long reign

As in many other settings both in the region—Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Thailand—and beyond, the Burmese military judged itself, as Defender of the Nation, more disciplined, responsible, patriotic and thus better equipped to govern than the squabbling civilian politicians, their former comrades-in-arms in the anti-colonial movements of the 1930s.

¹⁹ Nu (1907–95) was famous for having translated Dale Carnegie's book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, into Burmese. He also authored a stridently anti-capitalist and anti-colonial novel in Burmese with the Hobbesian title, *Man, the Wolf of Man*. See his eccentric memoir, *Saturday's Son*, New Haven 1975.

Ne Win's *tatmadaw* first took over, briefly, in 1958; but his caretaker military government held elections in 1960, and allowed the victorious Nu to return to office. Nu's bid in 1961 to fulfil a campaign promise to declare Buddhism the state religion prompted the Army's second intervention. The military leadership strongly opposed the move, concerned that it would alienate the already fractious non-Buddhist minorities. Predictably, a group of ethnic-minority leaders met in early 1962 to discuss a programme for a federalist constitution. The Burman-dominated War Office viewed this as a threat to the unity of the nation. Ne Win seized power again in 1962. The coup, applauded by the Kennedy Administration, was met with determined student protests. Their dissent was silenced when Ne Win's men blew up the Rangoon University Students' Union building on July 7, leaving dozens dead.

Ne Win's martial law nevertheless had a substantial degree of continuity with Aung San's and U Nu's vision of a strong, unified Burma as a self-sufficient, developmentalist state, free from foreign tutelage and interference. This was codified in Ne Win's 'Burmese Road to Socialism', a strange blend of Buddhism, nationalism and command economics. His isolationist foreign policy was close kin to Nu's militant neutralism and Aung San's refusal to bend the knee to George VI. All three were convinced that the country could prosper better on its own than as the client of some untrustworthy great power. Nor was this illogical in the context of the Cold War, when its Southeast Asian neighbours were being overrun by deadly proxy wars—Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia—or suffering under US-backed dictators: Suharto in Indonesia, Marcos in the Philippines. Domestically, the *tatmadaw*—still carrying the flag of Aung San's nationalist revolution—remained an admired institution for the majority of Burman-Burmese. While military corruption was not uncommon, the scale was relatively limited, not least because isolationism left the generals without access to Cold War largesse. Within the military, Ne Win handpicked *ta-byee*—'followers'—for promotion, and never allowed any rivals to emerge. But although his power was largely unchallenged, the ascetic Ne Win never indulged in the kleptocratic plunder characteristic of Suharto or Marcos.

Corruption was more widespread within the official (i.e. military-backed) Burma Socialist Programme Party, many of whose senior officials were former army officers. The BSPP government instituted a thorough-going nationalization of private business, eventually taking over the major

export–import operations for rice, timber, oil and other commodities, as well as most wholesalers and stores; when incompetent state planning failed, it released pressure by manipulating the black market. As a result of government economic policies, some 300,000 Indians and 100,000 Chinese, mainly traders and middlemen, left the country between 1963–67. A committed secularist, Ne Win repealed Nu's State Religion Protection Act and set about registering *hpongyis* and nationalizing monastic schools. Protests brought forth heavy repression. In 1974, students and disaffected monks seized the coffin of U Thant, former UN Secretary-General, in a demonstration against the dictatorship; many were killed in the subsequent crackdown. Army dissent was eradicated with equal zeal. In 1976 an officers' plot to assassinate Ne Win saw a large-scale purge that included the then Chief of Armed Forces, Tin Oo, who was charged with treason and sentenced to seven years' hard labour. (Later a co-founder of the National League for Democracy, Tin Oo has spent nearly as much time under arrest as Aung San Suu Kyi.)

Yet however strong its hold on the centre of the country, government authority was almost nonexistent in most of Burma's borderlands during the half-century following independence. Here the *tatmadaw* was engaged in fighting well-equipped forces, some backed by foreign states or funders—US, Chinese or Thai—or financed through natural-resource extraction and taxes levied on cross-border black-market trade. In addition the *maoisant* CPB, sometimes allied with national-minority armies, continued to hold large areas of 'liberated territory' along the Thai and Chinese borders and to field thousands of soldiers in its defence. The Kachin Independence Organization and the Karen National Union (at one point a CPB ally) had similar sized forces, fighting for secession from, or autonomy within, the unitary Burmese state. Perhaps a quarter of the country was under the control of armed opponents of the central government. Millions of villagers in these areas were prey to roving bands of militias, drug lords and black marketeers, who commandeered their goods and labour; warring parties on all sides were responsible for rape, torture, extrajudicial killings and destruction of homes. The government's counter-insurgency strategy, known as *Pya Ley Pya* or 'Four Cuts', was carried out on a shoestring, with poorly equipped *tatmadaw* soldiers posted far from Rangoon. Their efforts—brutal enough—produced little more than dry-season tactical gains.²⁰

²⁰ Maung Aung Myoe, *Building the Tatmadaw: Myanmar Armed Forces Since 1948*, Singapore 2009, and Andrew Selth, *Burma's Armed Forces*, Norwalk, CT 2002.

It has been estimated that around 10,000 people—farmers, traders, *hpongyis*, pastors, teachers, government soldiers, and armed rebels—died every year across the four decades of Burma's civil wars.²¹ The numbers are relatively low in comparison to lives lost in Indonesia, Cambodia or Vietnam, of course, or even to those killed by the Indian state in Assam, Nagaland and Kashmir. What differentiated the bloodshed in Burma's isolated borderlands was the proportional scale of the rebel-held area, combined with the coarsening and brutalizing effects on the national ethos under perpetual army rule. If the military and jurisdictional division of the country had first been imposed by British colonialism, its continuation after independence represented both a political and a moral failure on the part of the Burman-dominated state.

Trauma of 1988

By the late 1980s, the country's economic failure was also becoming apparent. While its neighbours—Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and, eventually, China—were attracting large-scale capital inflows through their pools of cheap skilled labour, after 25 years of *tatmadaw* rule Burma's autarkic economy was teetering on the brink of collapse. On 5 September 1987, in a spectacularly ill-advised move, the BSPP declared all kyat notes in circulation to be worthless and replaced them with a new series of notes, denominated in multiples of nine (fortune tellers had apparently advised Ne Win that nine would be propitious for his fate, or *yeh-ti-ya-che*). The few savers who kept their money in government-owned banks were entitled to transfer their deposits into new kyat notes. But the majority, who had believed their money would be safer under the floorboards, discovered that their life savings had been rendered worthless overnight. All but a handful of *lu-gyi*—‘big shots’—lost everything they had.

What followed was the greatest political upheaval of Burma's post-colonial history. Demonstrations erupted sporadically, followed by bloody crackdowns, in a cycle that built to a climax in the summer of 1988. In Rangoon and Mandalay, student-led protests paralysed the city. By late July, monks had taken over control of Mandalay's streets, wielding sticks as well as moral authority. A visitor described ‘monk commandos careening around town. Jeeps, trucks, private cars all are

²¹ Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, 2nd edn., London 1999, p. 101.

filled with monks travelling about town looking important, and usually with a couple of monks hanging on the side or sitting on the roof blowing their whistles furiously so that everyone will get out of their way.²² Many smaller cities and towns witnessed unprecedented protests. Dramatically, Ne Win, aged 78, stepped down in late July, while warning in his resignation speech that in future, 'if the army shoots, it hits—there is no firing in the air to scare.' Despite the threat, a massive mobilization on 8 August—8-8-88 was said to be auspicious—brought perhaps a million people onto the streets in popular demonstrations, including many state employees. The interim government ordered an end to the marches. Starting late at night on August 8, troops opened fire on unarmed demonstrators. Further protests and a general strike ensued. In a number of cases, demonstrators fought back and worsted the security forces. Army spokesmen would later claim that civilian protesters had killed more than 100 people, including 30 soldiers.²³ The final death toll has been estimated at between 3,000 and 10,000.

SLORC's new course

On September 18, army leaders took power directly and established the State Law and Order Restoration Council, or SLORC, chaired by Senior General Saw Maung. Under the SLORC the patterns that had long characterized Myanmar's social order would be turned inside out. The closed economy was now opened to foreign extraction of the country's natural resources (and soon subject to 40 per cent annual inflation). The frontier regions were given degrees of autonomous rule. The professional Army was bloated to more than twice its size and turned to rent-seeking. The relative egalitarianism of the Buddhist-nationalist 'planning system' was abandoned by second-generation *tatmadaw* rulers in favour of an untrammelled *enrichissez-vous*. Military rule was embellished with a façade of ad hoc constitutionalism, later framed as a set of linear steps down the 'Road Map to a Discipline-Flourishing Democracy'. Maoist guerrillas and British-trained Karen generals were replaced, as opposition icons, by the frail and photogenic Aung San Suu Kyi.

SLORC went ahead with the May 1990 elections for a constituent assembly, as promised by Ne Win, although it was toothless and the generals

²² Ward Keeler, 'Fighting for Democracy on a Heap of Jewels', Working Paper no. 102, Center of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1997, p. 14.

²³ *Bangkok Post*, 4 February 1989.

severely restricted campaign activities. The splintering of anti-regime ranks after the turbulent 1988 uprising was reflected in the 93 parties that had candidates on the ballot paper, but predominant among them was the National League for Democracy, established in September 1988 with Aung San Suu Kyi as its leading figure. Born in June 1945, the daughter of the martyred Father of the Nation had accompanied her mother Khin Kyi to Delhi in 1960, when the latter was appointed ambassador to India; after reading PPE at Oxford, Aung San Suu Kyi had spent most of her life abroad. She had returned to Burma in March 1988 to nurse her ailing mother, and quickly found herself at the forefront of the swelling opposition movement. Early on in the campaign she adopted a somewhat moderate line toward the military, but in late 1988 and the first half of 1989 she gradually stepped up her criticism, telling Western journalists, 'My father didn't build up the Burmese Army in order to suppress the people.'²⁴ On 20 July 1989 she was placed under house arrest for a term that lasted, in the first instance, until 1995. Nevertheless, in May 1990 the NLD went on to win almost 60 per cent of the popular vote, and 392 out of 492 seats; the military-backed National Unity Party won 21 per cent of the vote and only 10 seats—results that suggest a remarkably clean election, in the circumstances. The generals proceeded to disqualify, imprison or chase into exile the victorious candidates of the NLD and other parties that had allied with it. A National Convention was held in 1993, largely consisting of handpicked delegates (although the NLD participated until 1995), and charged with drafting guidelines for a future constitution.

At the same time, terrified of losing control of the streets again, the *tatmadaw* set about a massive expansion of its own ranks. The modernization of what had become the region's most undermanned and poorly equipped army occurred at a frantic pace, deemed necessary by the junta, which had been caught unprepared by the events of 1988. By 1995 the army had expanded from 180,000 to around 350,000.²⁵ Throughout the 1990s, nearly half the state budget was devoted to the security sector, boosted by soft loans from China, India and Thailand. Army growth created new problems for military leaders: widespread indiscipline, unprecedented corruption and looming factionalism. Logistics for this sprawling behemoth became unmanageable, and eventually the Quartermaster General gave up trying to provision soldiers,

²⁴ *Christian Science Monitor*, 13 June 1989.

²⁵ Andrew Selth, *Transforming the Tatmadaw: The Burmese Armed Forces Since 1988*, Canberra 2006.

instead requiring garrisoned units to provide for themselves from the local economy. The organizational culture of the *tatmadaw*, long centred on combat, was now focused on rent-seeking. Recruitment standards were lowered, since able young men preferred higher paying factory jobs in Thailand or Malaysia. Senior generals had always manipulated promotions, but with tens of thousands of new positions opening up in the expansion phase, the scale of personalistic politicking mushroomed and the factional implications grew byzantine.

Military Intelligence was also expanded, the number of MI detachments doubling from around 12 in 1988 to 23 in 1992. In the process, it was transformed from a combat-focused organization into a 'regime-defending "secret police"', buttressed by large numbers of paid or co-opted informants'.²⁶ MI's outlook was famously summed up in 1991 by its then chief, Major General Khin Nyunt, when he warned, 'Martial law means no law at all.' For the most part, however, the effectiveness of the generals' system of social control depended not on outright coercion but on the widespread fear that one could be arrested for almost anything at all, with devastating consequences. Self-imposed limitations on public behaviour became a small price to pay for staying off the regime's radar screen.

Frontier ceasefires

The ending of four decades of counter-insurgency warfare in the frontier regions was primarily the result of the junta's economic turn. Within two months of crushing the 1988 uprising, SLORC had done a deal with Thailand's generals to grant Thai timber companies access to the vast virgin forests of southeastern Myanmar. Bangkok abandoned its long-standing support for armed rebels in the area, a strategy designed in the 1950s to create a buffer between Cold War Thailand and leftist-run Burma and China. Thai leaders also advised their new business partners to build roads and develop the rebel-held border regions as, under the direction of US advisors, Thailand had done in the early 1980s to fight its own Communist insurgency.²⁷ The opportunity to do so presented itself

²⁶ Lt. Col. James McAndrew, 'From Combat to Karaoke: Burmese Military Intelligence, 1948-2006', MS Thesis, National Defense Intelligence College, 2007, p. 77; McAndrew served as US military attaché in Rangoon in the early 2000s.

²⁷ Tom Kramer, 'Thai Foreign Policy Towards Burma, 1987-1993', MA Thesis, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1994, esp. p. 68; and Pavin Chachavalpongpun, *A Plastic Nation: The Curse of Thainess in Thai-Burmese Relations*, Lanham, MD 2005.

early in 1989, when rank-and-file Wa and Kokang troops in northeastern Myanmar rebelled against the (Burman) leadership of the CPB there. Khin Nyunt offered Wa and Kokang leaders separate ceasefire agreements, granting them extensive local autonomy over economic, social and local political affairs and the right to hold on to their weapons. Combined with the retraction of Soviet and Chinese assistance to left-wing groups, the deal effectively finished off the 41-year-old CPB rebellion.

Under pressure from Thailand and China, also now involved in resource-extraction deals, another 25 groups subsequently negotiated ceasefire arrangements or surrenders with SLORC or its successor, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), constituted in 1997. Rangoon refused any negotiations with armed coalitions, such as the National Democratic Front, formed in 1976 by the major non-Communist armies; but it continued to deal with individual groups. Since each agreement carried different terms—none of which were made public, although some details have been leaked—a bewildering array of political arrangements has emerged in these areas, extending to the near total autonomy of the United Wa State Army in parts of Shan State. In most of these former war zones, ex-rebel groups were permitted to retain their arms, police their own territory and use their soldiers as private-security forces to protect business operations; however, the right to carry arms was set to expire once the 'Road Map to Discipline-Flourishing Democracy' process was complete—a potential time-bomb. By the mid-1990s, the frontier-zone wars had largely come to an end and villagers could begin fashioning post-war lives in territory redesignated as special autonomy areas, or coming under central or mixed administration. However, the ceasefire agreements offered no lasting solutions to the social, political and economic grievances that had long fuelled Myanmar's insurgencies.

As the combat stopped, the Burmese military hastened to cash in on teak, gold and gems deals, and gain control over lucrative trade routes to China and Thailand. Foreign investment was channelled into joint ventures with military holding companies, which creamed off large sums for their own purposes. While these deals brought in millions for the generals, they created few jobs for Burmese workers: Chinese firms involved in the rubber plantations or teak harvesting brought their own labourers with them. In addition to the resources of its forests, vast reserves of natural gas were discovered in the 1990s in Burmese waters in the Andaman Sea, the Gulf of Mottama and, more recently, in the Bay

of Bengal. It took nearly ten years for the windfall profits to materialize: in 1999–2000, natural gas accounted for less than 1 per cent of all export earnings, but it was over 40 per cent by 2006–07. By late 2007, hundreds of millions of dollars had rolled in, and 25 offshore blocks were under exploration in joint ventures between Myanmar's government and oil companies from Australia, Britain, France, Canada, China, Indonesia, India, Malaysia, Russia, South Korea and Thailand.²⁸

Situated in this energy-hungry region, these reserves give the SPDC the ultimate trump card, and the regime has shrewdly played foreign energy-seekers off against each other. Competition has been fiercest between India and China, particularly over the output of the 'Shwe' gas field off the Rakhine coast. In its joint venture exploration there with Daewoo, the regime has found some 3 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, with an estimated total market value over \$80 billion. From that field alone, the Myanmar government will earn an estimated \$800 million per year from 2010–2030. China, with its own trump card of a UN Security Council veto, appears to have won those sweepstakes, and is about to build a 2,380 km pipeline from Myanmar's west coast to Yunnan province. India signed a \$150 million natural gas exploration deal with the SPDC in the middle of the September 2007 protests.²⁹

New rich

With these funds, the *tatmadaw* has undertaken a massive remaking of state and society, comparable perhaps to that of the British after 1886. The principal focus has been the brand-new up-country capital, Nay Pyi Taw. Built on a vast scale, complete with eight-lane highways, the city grid consists of four sections, divided by function: commerce, housing, army and bureaucracy. Privileges are determined by rank, so that—for example—all deputy ministers get the same kind of house in the same neighbourhood. But even Rangoon, until quite recently a quaintly

²⁸ Through clever accounting, the gas revenues have been converted into kyat at the official rate, meaning that 6 kyat for each of the 2.5 billion dollars earned this year will enter the national treasury. Unofficially, the kyat trades at about 1,200 per dollar. Sean Turnell, 'Burma Isn't Broke', *Wall Street Journal*, 6 August 2009.

²⁹ China may build a second pipeline to transport Gulf oil from tankers docking at a new deepwater port on Myanmar's Rakhine coast, thus avoiding the flashpoint of the Strait of Malacca. See Ashild Kolas, 'Burma in the Balance: The Geopolitics of Gas', *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 31, no. 4, 2007. Figures may overstate future revenues, given the current volatility in energy prices.

decrepit, 1950s-era urban relic, now looks like a fast-mouldering replica of Kuala Lumpur, with a rash of high-rise condominiums and office buildings, highways and traffic jams. Ten new townships have been built on the city's outskirts, as well as Bangkok-style luxury suburbs, shopping malls and high-end grocery stores. Hundreds of pagodas have been erected across the country, and there are plans to link up with the Asian Highways project. The Ministry of Information boasts of constructing 26,127 bridges, 17 airports, 6,801 schools and 188 television retransmission stations since 1988.³⁰

With this has come the emergence of an ostentatious new elite: a few score families at the top of the regime have created a Hollywoodesque lifestyle, almost as lavish as that of the celebrities—Jennifer Aniston, Woody Harrelson, Sylvester Stallone and others—calling for its overthrow. Senior military officers have come to expect royal treatment, while their wives, sons, daughters, in-laws and cousins have seized business opportunities brought by Myanmar's 'opening'—buying up undervalued land, gem businesses and hotels; exploiting monopolistic access to assets and extortionary joint-venture requirements for foreign investors. Profiting from its connections to the dictatorship, this class has come to inhabit a luxury-laden parallel universe, far removed from the problems of Myanmar's people. Its symbol was the extravagant wedding of Senior General Than Shwe's daughter in 2008 to an army officer. The bride, laden with diamonds, received an estimated \$50 million worth of gifts, while guests were treated to a lavish banquet and champagne reception.

If the citizens have not appeared grateful for these developments, it is not just because many were forcibly relocated to make way for them, or obliged to provide labour on the burgeoning building sites. For all its resources, Myanmar's GDP per capita in 2006 was less than half that of Bangladesh or Laos. Only a tiny percentage of Burmese have benefited from the country's new-found wealth, and the level of inequality has soared over the past twenty years. Central Myanmar's thousands of formerly self-sustaining rice-growing villages and rural townships have suffered especially. From its inception, the SLORC/SPDC regulated rice prices—forcing farmers to sell at artificially low prices, putting cheap rice in urban markets and army canteens but plunging farmers into penury.

³⁰ See *Chronicle of National Development*, Myanmar Ministry of Information, 2007.

In 2003, the government officially deregulated the rice trade, but many local military commanders have enforced restrictions on the movement of rice to markets so that they can continue buying farmers' surpluses at rock-bottom prices, sometimes even below what they cost to grow. Cultivators have lost their land to moneylenders who, in the absence of viable formal financial institutions, have lent money out at rates of interest from 10–15 per cent a month for farmers with land, but 10–20 per cent a *day* for high-risk, asset-less borrowers. As a result, numerous families have become day labourers on what used to be their own land. Even in the relatively more rice-rich, pre-cyclone Irrawaddy Delta, recent studies point to widespread tenancy, debt and food insecurity.³¹

Desperate for alternative sources of income, many have sent their children off to work in factories in urban areas or agro-industrial plantations. Millions of Burmese have moved to other countries for work as domestics, sex workers or factory hands. As of late 2008 there were 3–4 million Burmese migrant workers—up to 8 per cent of the population—in Thailand alone. In 2005 a UN Development Programme report, carried out in consultation with the government, found that 90 per cent of the population lived on less than 65 cents per day. The average household spends three-quarters of its budget on food.³² According to UN figures, a third of children under five suffer from malnutrition, in a region where average child malnutrition rates are less than 15 percent. It estimated that close to 700,000 people each year suffer from malaria and 130,000 from tuberculosis. Child mortality figures are double the regional average: 109 per 1,000 children die before the age of five.³³

The social fabric of central Myanmar, relatively intact up to 1988, has come under immense strain in the course of the SLORC's liberalization programme. Today, half of Burma's children do not complete primary education, mainly because registration fees—which go to supplement teachers' abysmally low salaries—far exceed the incomes of most families. This, in a country where parents will do almost anything to provide

³¹ Nancy Hudson-Rodd and Myo Nyunt, 'Control of Land and Life in Burma', *Land Tenure Center Brief*, no. 3, April 2001.

³² UNDP/Myanmar and Ministry of National Planning (Myanmar), 'Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey in Myanmar: Vulnerability-Related Information', 8 March 2006.

³³ 'Statement of the UN Country Team in Myanmar on the Occasion of UN Day', Rangoon, 24 October 2007; Department for International Development (UK), 'Country Assistance Plan, Burma', London, October 2004, p. 3.

their children with an education. Middle-class families in the Irrawaddy valley scrape together funds to send their young people out of the country for work or school, as there is no future for them in the gutted education system or miserable civil service. Some villages have no young people between the ages of 16 and 30 left in them. A family's hopes can be wiped out by the costs of one funeral, flood, poor harvest or even a mild illness.

In the Buddhist areas, monasteries have long provided the major social safety net, offering shelter to the homeless and education to children whose families cannot afford government-school fees.²⁴ But the monks in turn depend on local communities for rice, curry and other provisions through daily alms-giving and other ceremonial donations. With the deepening impoverishment of recent years, many of Myanmar's rural and urban poor have been lucky to get one meatless meal a day and have been ashamed that they could no longer provide alms to their *hpongyis* or hold *shin-pyu* ceremonies for their young sons to become *koyin*, or novice monks. The *sangha* has been acutely aware of the growing crisis: monasteries across the country have been overrun with orphans, invalids and the desperately poor needing shelter, care and food. But monks have sometimes had to refuse those trying to take robes or shelter with them—there simply has not been enough food to go around.

March of the monks

On 15 August 2007, probably as an ad hoc solution to cash-flow problems, the regime announced an immediate slash in fuel subsidies, resulting in price rises of up to 500 per cent for petrol, diesel and compressed natural gas. The effects were traumatic for the already shaky economy. Especially hard hit were the very poorest people living on the fringes of urban areas, such as day labourers from Rangoon's satellite towns—South Dagon, Hlaing Thar Yar or North Okkalapa. They live far from possible downtown work sites, where they might earn 1,000 kyats per day (about 83 US cents). The overnight hike in city bus fares from 100 to 500 kyats cut severely into their incomes, most of which was already being spent on food and transport. Businesses, students and others were hurt, too. With little reliable electricity outside the generals' new capital,

²⁴ Churches provide similar services in regions with large Christian populations, such as Chin State, Kachin State, and Karen villages in the Irrawaddy Delta. Some of the most effective relief programmes after Nargis were undertaken by monks and Christian pastors who had previously established a humanitarian interfaith network.

diesel generators are essential for any business to survive or for a family to provide light after 6 pm for their children to study by.

On August 19, dozens of activists organized a peaceful, silent march through Rangoon to protest the new economic hardships. Among the marchers were high-school and university students, members of the NLD and well-known leaders of the '88 Generation', former political prisoners who had been jailed for their participation in the pro-democracy uprising of 1988; most had been released in late 2004, but had not hitherto developed any visible strategy for mobilization. Also in the Rangoon demonstrations were a handful of other activists who had been protesting against the worsening economic plight of ordinary Burmese for the past year.³⁵ Smaller demonstrations continued for the next few days, until a menacing new militia, the *Swan Arr Shin*, behaving not unlike Suharto's *Pemuda Pancasila* thugs, arrived on the scene.³⁶ Over a hundred protestors were arrested, including 13 of the 88 Generation network. Undaunted, other protestors, including members of Myanmar's usually conservative but occasionally politicized *sangha*, managed sporadic but typically quite small demonstrations in many different parts of the country. Few imagined the monks would pick up where the August protestors left off.

No one knows how many monks there are at any given time in Myanmar, since the monasteries are decentralized and Buddhists can enter or leave the monkhood freely, at any time; but a reasonable estimate might be around half a million.³⁷ It had appeared to some observers that SLORC/SPDC reforms—sponsoring monasteries, promoting particularly other-worldly, 'apolitical' monks—had largely succeeded in co-opting the

³⁵ One such protest in February 2007 ended with the small crowd craftily chanting, 'Long live the Senior General!'

³⁶ Little known in Rangoon before 2007, this militia had made appearances in rural areas since at least 2005. There have also been reports in ethnic-minority regions of forced conscription into the pro-government 'Pyi-Thu Sit-Tat' (People's Militia).

³⁷ All Buddhist boys are expected to spend a few months in a monastery as *koyin*. At 19 they can be ordained as *hpongyis*, but this need not involve renouncing the secular life forever. Many men return to the monkhood for short periods to study, find respite or prepare themselves for major life changes such as marriage or migration. Predictably, statistics on religion are unreliable in Myanmar. Burman leaders probably inflate the proportion of Buddhists, on the other hand, while Burmans and Western NGOs generally assume that Kachin, Chin and Karen minorities are Christian, the majority of Karens are actually Buddhists. See Ardeth Maung Thawngmung, *The Karen Revolution*, Washington, DC 2008.

sangha, already divided into nine competing sects.³⁸ But this was to underestimate the effects of the social and economic crisis on the monasteries themselves. On 5 September 2007, just as the fuel protests appeared to be losing momentum, several hundred *hpongyis* from a large monastery in Pakokku joined lay residents in a local demonstration. Pakokku is a rural market town in the Magway province, known for its large, highly respected teaching monasteries, and now also for the accelerating poverty that characterizes most towns in central Myanmar. What transpired is not completely clear, but it appears that the police or soldiers fired live ammunition and rubber bullets over the heads of demonstrators. When they did not disperse, security forces, including thugs from a local *Swan Arr Shin* group, reportedly assaulted several monks, and there is an unconfirmed report of the death of one *hpongyi*. The next day, when a delegation of township officials visited the Maha Visutarama monastery, angry monks held them hostage, demanding an official apology for the beatings. On September 9, a statement was circulated on the internet by the 'All Burma Buddhist Monks' Alliance'—a previously unknown group, probably consisting of youngish monks, more radicalized than most—suggesting a deadline of September 17 for the regime to apologize and calling for a reduction in commodity and fuel prices.

With no apology forthcoming, *hpongyis* in Rangoon, Mandalay, Sittwe and a handful of other towns turned over their alms bowls (known in Pali, the religious language of Burmese Buddhism, as *patta-nikkujjana-kamma*) to symbolize their refusal to accept donations from military personnel and their families, thus denying them the ability to acquire 'merit' or *kutho*.³⁹ In Chauk (like Pakokku, in Magway division) and Kyaukpadaung (Mandalay division), monks started their processions on September 17, and the Rangoon *sangha* followed suit the next day. For several days, steadily increasing numbers of *hpongyis* from all over Rangoon division marched in an orderly fashion, chanting the *metta sutta* prayers of loving kindness. The timing of the protests was significant: September 18 was the date of the coup that brought the generals back into direct political power in 1988. The marches came at the tail

³⁸ Juliane Schober, 'Buddhist Visions of Moral Authority and Modernity in Burma,' in Monique Skidmore, ed., *Burma at the Turn of the 21st Century*, Honolulu 2005, pp. 113–32. See also Ingrid Jordt, *Burma's Mass Lay Meditation Movement: Buddhism and the Cultural Construction of Power*, Athens, OH 2007.

³⁹ In his classic *History of Modern Burma*, John Cady writes that throughout the country's history, the alms boycott was used by monks in 'an evil community needing to be disciplined effectively' (p. 51).

end of a severe rainy season, extraordinarily so in Rangoon. Instead of meditating in the comfort and shelter of their monasteries, long processions of monks marched through the streets of Rangoon amid torrential downpours, clad only in their maroon robes and flip-flops. At times they had to wade through the waist-deep floods of a city abandoned by its government, with scant upkeep of its sewers. They did so in the name of the suffering of the people of Myanmar. Within a few days, the monks were joined by tens of thousands of citizens, who formed protective human chains along the edges of the processions. Some of them expanded the original marchers' demands—restored fuel subsidies and an apology for Pakokku—to include democratic reform and 'regime change'. Footage of the protests, shot by cellphones and ubiquitous digital cameras, was soon circulating on the internet and being aired by foreign newsrooms.

Crackdown

It took the generals nearly a week to respond to the growing protests. Having shifted their families, bureaucrats and cronies to the comforts of Nay Pyi Taw in 2005, the regime had grown badly out of touch with events in the country's major conurbation. The Burmese military has long discouraged the reporting of bad news up the chain of command; as the rural economy has deteriorated, the leadership has received less and less accurate information from regional garrisons or civil servants with first-hand knowledge of the worsening situation on the ground. The dismantling of the MI apparatus in 2004, following a power struggle between Than Shwe and Khin Nyunt, has exacerbated their ignorance.⁴⁰ As a result, the generals missed obvious opportunities in August and September 2007 to ameliorate the situation. They could have apologized to the Pakokku monks and offered them prodigious alms, or locked down the Rangoon monasteries early in the protests. By the time the regime grasped the scale of the unrest, the mass demonstrations had gathered a momentum of their own.

On September 24, Brigadier General Thura Myint Maung, Minister of Religious Affairs, proclaimed the protests to be the work of 'internal

⁴⁰ Khin Nyunt and his family were arrested, and upwards of 600 officers were jailed. In October 2007, many angry Rangoon residents told me that none of this would have happened if he had been in power. He would have understood how serious the situation was and apologized. For background, see Kyaw Yin Hlaing, 'Myanmar in 2004: Another Year of Uncertainty', *Asian Survey*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2005, pp. 174–9.

and external destructive elements', junta code for enemies of the state. Promising action 'according to the law', he pressured the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee—comprised of senior *hpongyis* who rotate through membership—to order all monks to stay out of secular affairs. The next evening, the regime deployed 33 loudspeaker trucks to sweep Rangoon neighbourhoods, broadcasting announcements of a new night-time curfew and resurrecting its ban on public meetings of more than five. Meanwhile, crack troops from the police and army took up their positions. On September 26, riot police and combat troops fired shots—some live ammunition, though mostly rubberized bullets—at unarmed protestors, and beat them in several locations. Acting on orders that undoubtedly came from Than Shwe, security forces raided Rangoon monasteries on the night of September 26–27, and in some cases unleashed wanton brutality on sleeping *hpongyis*. That night, hundreds of monks were arrested, while thousands more escaped to rural towns and villages all over the country. On September 27, troops again roughed up and shot at protestors in a number of locations. Some victims were innocent bystanders who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Other protestors were singled out for assassination, probably identified as leaders or 'destructive elements' of one sort or another.

At least thirty people died in the crackdown, including a Japanese photojournalist. Over the next few weeks, security forces carried out terrorizing post-curfew raids on more than fifty monasteries and hundreds of homes. Using the video footage and photos emailed out of the country and posted on blogs and news sites, the regime targeted those suspected of leading or participating in protests. In the tradition of their British colonial predecessors, security personnel rounded up family members of suspects and held them hostage until the targets could be flushed out of hiding. At least three thousand in Rangoon were arrested and charged with terrorism. They were detained and interrogated in six hastily assembled holding camps around the city. A dozen or more people, including eight monks, died in custody.⁴ Within two weeks, Myanmar's ambassador to the UN could confidently announce a full return to 'normalcy'.

⁴ This account of the protests and crackdown is based on research in Myanmar from November–December 2007, January–March 2008, and October 2008. I also draw on: Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar', UN Human Rights Council, 5 December 2007; and Human Rights Watch, 'Crackdown: Repression of the 2007 Popular Protests in Burma', December 2007.

By May 2008, when Cyclone Nargis and the subsequent storm surge of about 3.5 metres swept across the Irrawaddy Delta, killing 200,000 people, it was clear that the regime had not only weathered the storm of the previous September, but would also manage the opprobrium heading its way in the aftermath of the cyclone. Although Ban Ki-moon's discussions with junta leaders resulted in visas for dozens of foreign relief experts, the generals balked at more concessions and insisted that they would take care of the needy. (On 30 May, the *New Light of Myanmar* chastized victims for being overly reliant on foreign aid: 'Myanmar people can easily get fish for dishes by just fishing in the fields and ditches. In the early monsoon, large edible frogs are abundant.') However, once the emergency phase of the disaster was over, international donors proved less willing to take on the long-term commitments required for rehabilitation and recovery. By late 2008 they had paid out only half the funds requested in the UN appeal. Aid to farmers remained particularly neglected.

Sources of power

Inside and outside the country, the euphoria of the moment in September 2007, when marching monks were joined by ever-greater crowds of hopeful citizens, masked the improbability of meaningful political change. Myanmar's military-based regime was not crumbling. In some respects its position has even been reinforced over the past two decades. The sources of its power can be traced to its historical origins. The colonial state that preceded it had decapitated the indigenous social order, and instituted a policy of ethnic divide and rule—'martial' frontier races against the centre—that was extreme even by imperial standards. The British order collapsed, levelled by war, without having established the typical raft of post-colonial relays. The result, as the Japanese withdrew, was an institutional vacuum and an ethnic powder-keg. In these conditions, the Burmese army soon emerged as the most—indeed, the only—credible upholder of national unity and patriotic identity, while its promise of a swift route to modernity gave it further popular appeal.

Ne Win's regime was routinely authoritarian, secretive and suspicious of outsiders, not without historical reason; but—though conflicts raged unceasingly in the frontier regions—it shed relatively little Burman blood. In putting an end to the ethnic fighting SLORC and its successor,

the SPDC, have neutralized the regime's most determined enemies, qualitatively strengthening their national position. In this respect it is worth noting where the monks did not march in September 2007. The geography of protest mapped almost isomorphically onto the 120-year-old administrative partition separating Ministerial Burma from the Excluded Areas.⁴² The September protests played out mainly in the central heartlands, which have seen popular mobilizations around political and economic demands every decade since the early twentieth century. By contrast, the grievances of local populations along the borders with India, China and Thailand historically tended to be mobilized behind proto-national claims for autonomy from Rangoon.

For over a century the contrast between the modernity of the mostly Burman centre and the neglect and 'backwardness' of the hill regions had been a political given. However, that landscape changed when the frontier wars were ended, flawed though the ceasefire agreements were. Since the late 1980s, the national topography of development and wealth generation has undergone a virtual reversal, putting parts of the border regions in the forefront for what few economic opportunities exist in this very poor country. The big winners have been a handful of ceasefire leaders, regional military commanders, Chinese and Thai timber and mining companies, and drug lords; but many villagers have seized the chance to try to claw their way out of decades of insecurity. Poverty in some of these regions is rife, and by most measures far more endemic than it is in Myanmar's heartlands.⁴³ The key to explaining their relative silence in September 2007, however, is that, for ordinary farmers, traders, artisans and white-collar workers in these regions, oppression and exploitation come not just from the central regime but from a range of other sources—former rebel commanders, traditional leaders, religious authorities, foreign investors, businessmen, human traffickers, drug lords—who may provide the only available sources of income for populations poorly served by the formal economy.

After nearly half a century in power, Myanmar's *tatmadaw* retains the political initiative. After long deliberations, the National Convention

⁴² There were a few exceptions in ethnic-nationality areas, such as Myitkyina, Kachin State.

⁴³ In 2005 the UNDP/CSO survey found that the proportion of people living below the poverty line was 52 per cent in Eastern Shan State, and 70 per cent in Chin State.

established in 1993 finally concluded its work in August 2007. It was announced that the (still unpublished) Constitution would be put to a referendum in May 2008, followed by general elections in 2010. The referendum duly went ahead, despite the disaster of Cyclone Nargis, and the government press reported that the Constitution had been approved by a majority of 92 per cent, on a 98 per cent turnout. The much-redrafted Constitution, now 194 pages long, allocates a quarter of the seats in both national and provincial-level legislatures to the military, who will vote there under army discipline. The Commander-in-Chief retains the right to declare emergency rule as he sees fit, and to appoint cabinet ministers without legislative approval.⁴⁴ As yet, no election law has been promulgated to define the rules of campaigning in the 2010 election, but it is generally assumed that the NLD will be barred from participation.

The regime has further buttressed its position through the creation of a proto-party body, the Union Solidarity Development Association, founded in 1993 to 'organize the people to have belief in the nation's policies and take part with might and main in implementing them.'⁴⁵ The USDA now claims over 25 million members, including government employees (some of whom do not realize they have become members), businessmen, teachers and students. Their membership earns them access to welfare services, business licences and educational openings. In some districts the USDA branch holds greater sway than the local administration, but in most there is an extensive overlap of personnel between the USDA, local officials and business interests. The USDA has begun to expand into explicitly political areas, including the harassment of opposition leaders or foreign-aid projects and, most recently, the creation of the *Swan Arr Shin* militia. It can be confident of success in the 2010 legislative elections.

In the short term, 2010 may be the cause of further conflicts in the border regions. In April 2009, as the end of the 'Road Map' process hove into view, the junta demanded that the minority forces disarm and place their troops under central command, as a new Border Guard Force. Some of the smaller ceasefire groups acquiesced, but at least four major forces have thus far rebuffed it and regrouped as the Myanmar

⁴⁴ See the analysis of the new constitution in International Crisis Group, 'Myanmar: Towards the Elections', *Asia Report*, no. 174, 20 August 2009.

⁴⁵ *New Light of Myanmar*, 23 May 2006; on its founding see *New Light of Myanmar*, 16 September 1993.

Peace and Democracy Front.⁴⁶ With the deadline looming, Burmese artillery units moved into positions around the autonomy zones of the recalcitrant groups, including the Wa and Kachins. On 8 August 2009 the *tatmadaw* took advantage of an internal power struggle within the Kokang ceasefire group to move in and overthrow its leader. Thousands of villagers fled in fear across the border to China. However, the other three members of the Peace and Democracy Front offered little support to the Kokangs during the crisis beyond a joint press statement.⁴⁷

Oppositions?

In the central regions, there is widespread popular anger and contempt for the dictatorship, and many Burmese take pride in 'everyday forms of resistance'—delighting at video CDs of military gaffes, for instance. But the negative strength of the regime still holds. The junta can draw on decades of mistrust to sustain divisions between a Burman-dominated National League for Democracy and the militant minority groupings, as well as fostering differences among the latter. It has survived, not because it faces no criticism, but because its multiple opponents—NLD, *sangha*, minority groups, exile organizations—have found it impossible to unite. Thus no countervailing power is capable of challenging its domination at national level. When partial challenges emerge, the generals are adept at managing them—as with the 1996 student protests in Rangoon or the monks in 2007—through a combination of bribery and repression. In doing so they can draw on a range of pacification measures that dates back to Crosthwaite.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ The four are the United Wa State Army, 15,000–20,000 troops; the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), 5,000–6,000 troops; the Mongla-based National Democratic Alliance Army–Eastern Shan State (NDAA–ESS), under 2,000 troops; and the Kokang ceasefire group, 1,000–1,500 troops. See Tom Kramer, 'Burma's Cease-fires at Risk', Transnational Institute, Amsterdam, September 2009.

⁴⁷ The United Wa State Army did send troops to Kokang in early August, but Wa leaders insist they were there to mediate between the Burmese Army and the Kokang, and that they left without a shot fired on August 28, when they concluded their mediation had failed. A small number of Wa soldiers stayed behind to protect a bridge of strategic value to the Wa, but they did not fight on the behalf of the Kokang. Kramer, 'Burma's Cease-fires at Risk'.

⁴⁸ The SLORC regularly invoked the Village Act (1907) and Towns Act (1907), laws which allow local leaders to demand compulsory labour from residents. Martin Smith makes the point about conflict 'management' in *State of Strife: The Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict in Burma*, Washington, DC 2007.

Western governments and Burmese exile groups alike insist that power should be transferred to the NLD, the only entity they consider legitimate. Unfortunately the NLD no longer resembles a political party of any sort. More than a decade ago, after scores of its MPs had been jailed or forced into exile, Aung San Suu Kyi and her elderly lieutenants imposed a ruthless centralism on the small number of elected MPs still active and expelled those who disagreed, ending all pretence of intra-party democracy. With Suu Kyi under house arrest for most of the last two decades and her 'Uncles'—as the octogenarians on the Central Executive Committee are called—lacking either imagination or much of a following, the NLD is no longer a mobilizing force. They were as out of touch as the generals when the August 2007 fuel-price hikes decimated the economy: an NLD spokesperson actually denounced the protests led by the 88 Generation. Soon thereafter, the 'Youth Wing' left the party. Suu Kyi retains the admiration of most Burmese, including minorities. But many among the latter are reticent when it comes to the question of her and the NLD's fitness for rule. They have not forgotten that the Uncles are themselves ex-officers who led Four Cuts counter-insurgency campaigns in the borderlands, while the NLD has never given serious consideration to federalist demands.

The *sangha* could, and still can, call upon deep reserves of moral authority in their criticisms of the regime, yet cannot be anything more than a body of dissenters from, or accessories to, the ruling power. Individual monks have occasionally been resistance leaders, but in the past hundred years none have ever presented a serious threat to the governing elite. As September 2007 indicated, a section of the *sangha* is still ready to give voice to the social desperation it has seen developing over the last fifteen or twenty years. But whatever moral leverage they may have had in their boycotts of alms from *lu-gyi*, their courage was not enough to shake the *tatmadaw*, let alone overthrow it.

The best-organized opposition forces in Myanmar are also the most divided. Numerous former insurgent groups—17 at least—negotiated separate ceasefire agreements which generally allowed them to retain both a military and a civilian wing.⁴⁹ They are quite adept at mobilizing around particularistic grievances and can be a costly nuisance to

⁴⁹ Any attempt to give a specific number of groups is somewhat misleading, given that the regime on several occasions managed to break off small factions, sometimes performing lavish ceasefire ceremonies with only a few dozen soldiers.

the regime—often out of all proportion to their actual troop strength—through disrupting lucrative trade routes and natural-resource concessions. But without real alliances in the Burman centre, they cannot threaten the regime. The position of the ethnic-minority leaders is in any case becoming increasingly difficult. A generation ago they led their followers into ceasefires with promises of peace and development, but existence in the borderlands remains precarious, in the face of growing food insecurity, disease and exploitation by Thai and Chinese logging and mining firms. Many former rebel leaders now face rivals—either internal to the group or critics from the diaspora—who charge them with collaboration or ‘being too close to’ the SPDC. The demand that they now disarm and regroup as a Border Force under central command greatly increases these pressures. On the other hand, in all these regions there are large numbers of people who define themselves as ethnically distinct from the group for which the post-ceasefire autonomy zone or state is named. This provides the SPDC with a range of possible allies to court in a divide-and-rule strategy, while the internal power struggles of the ceasefire groups can create pretexts for the *tatmadaw* to move into new territory. Again, if the minorities opt to resist disarmament they may face the same fate as Kokang.

A fourth front of opposition is constituted by Burmese exiles, along with the transnational advocacy networks that have embraced and trained them. The courageous youth of the 1988 uprising who fled the country have managed to make ‘Free Burma’ as common a clarion call as ‘Free Tibet’ in enlightened Western circles, and they have established highly professional media agencies such as *Mizzima* and *Irrawaddy*. But their discourse, largely framed in terms of ‘regime change’, is often reduced to easily digestible, ahistorical narratives for Western audiences eager to sign online petitions or join media-friendly campaigns. The tens, perhaps hundreds, of millions of dollars spent on pro-democracy campaigns outside Burma may have provided gifted young exiles with helpful technical training and higher education, but they have yet to produce organizations capable of fostering significant political change inside the country. To the extent that their tactics have relied on Western governments’ economic sanctions, they have had a detrimental effect—damaging opportunities for small farmers, artisans and traders, while strengthening the hand of the most xenophobic generals, who carried on lining their pockets with commodity-export deals. In many cases, the SPDC has managed to turn embargoes, travel restrictions and Security

Council resolutions to its own advantage. Overseas advocates continue to press for better, 'smarter' measures that will finally deliver a crushing blow. But inside Myanmar, US and UK sanctions policies are viewed as having definitively failed to bring about democratic reform.

Nevertheless, the Senior General may not sleep easy in his bed. No leader of post-colonial Burma has ever left his post without losing face, as well as his family's assets, status and even freedom. After U Nu was kicked out of office in 1962, he spent four years in jail. In the 1970s, he tried haplessly to mount an armed offensive against Ne Win's BSPP. A frail old man by the time of the 1988 uprising, he nonetheless declared himself Prime Minister again, though few paid him much attention. He died in 1995. After Ne Win's resignation in July 1988, the former dictator lived out his days in seclusion watching videos, while his influence waned over the new generation of generals in SLORC. He died alone in utter irrelevance in 2002. His children and grandchildren, long accustomed to their privileged lives as the first family, eventually found themselves in jail, charged with hatching a bizarre coup plan involving 'black magic, soothsayers and three little dolls representing the country's three top generals'.⁹⁰ Senior General Saw Maung, Ne Win's successor, was booted from SLORC in 1992 and lived under a kind of house arrest until his death in 1997. Khin Nyunt, probably Than Shwe's only real rival in the last 20 years, was arrested along with his wife, two sons, daughter, son-in-law and fortune teller in 2004. He was charged with corruption, but his real crime was that he had become known as a 'soft-liner' and was thought to be willing to compromise on Suu Kyi. Moreover, his MI files contained dirt on everyone in the military, including Than Shwe and the vice chairman of the SPDC, General Maung Aye. The Senior General is well aware of this history, and neither he nor his insatiable family will go down without a fight.

Than Shwe has presided over a fire-sale of the country's resources: large sections of its forests have been clear-cut, its rivers dredged for gold, and jade mined for export. Even the Irrawaddy, the symbolic lifeblood of the nation, is on the verge of being dammed near its source in Kachin State, as Chinese companies seek to generate electricity for nearby Yunnan. This has accompanied an unprecedented impoverishment of central

⁹⁰ In December 2008, Ne Win's daughter, Sanda Win, was released after six years under house arrest. Her husband and three sons remain in jail. For the charges, see *New York Times*, 27 September 2002.

and southern Myanmar, the historic heartland as Burmans define it. In September 2007 the Western media was keen to conclude that the monks' messages about suffering were a call for 'human rights' and 'democracy', constituting another colourful revolution on the march. The marchers undoubtedly carried multiple agendas into the streets, but their central demands were economic, focused on fuel prices and common suffering—a call for compassion. The protests reflected the sense that Myanmar's once proud heartland teeters on the brink of economic and social catastrophe.

A real challenge to the regime would have to overcome the deep divisions fostered by the British, the continuation of which under the *thakins* and their military successors constitutes Myanmar's great failure. It would need to rally both the minorities and the deeply impoverished centre, as well as sectors of the armed forces, behind an economic programme that would heal the country's gaping inequalities, and in support of a constitutional settlement at once federal and democratic. If this is deemed too much to ask, Anglo-American critics—the British in particular—should look in the mirror. The repertoire of ethnic division and state repression upon which the *tatmadaw* draw is the reflected legacy of their own rule.

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JOACHIM KALKA

MONEY AS WE KNEW IT?

I am persistently plagued by a strange vision of wealth, triumph and liberation. However much I fight it, I cannot extricate myself from that dream: suddenly, I see myself swimming in gold.

Léon Bloy, *Diary*, 19 June 1902¹

Throw a dollar at me, would ya? How does it feel to have a million thrown at you?

Carl Barks, 'Letter to Santa'²

MONEY GIVES US pleasure, Brecht needlessly told us, but that is not what will be meant here—not the kind of pleasure ignited by money because we lust after the unlimited opportunities it promises. We should rather be thinking of something more banal and mysterious: of the intrinsic sensuousness of the actual money itself—small metal discs, or oblong strips of rustling, crackling paper. In Balzac, an artist tries to marry into a bourgeois family; he carelessly remarks that money is there to be spent—since it is round, it must roll. The father of the family, reacting with the deepest mistrust, replies: 'If it is round for prodigals, it is flat for economical people who pile it up.' The opposite approaches of the bohemian and the rentier (by the end of the tale they have comfortably fused) converge in images of the concrete pleasures of money. Both are thinking of the ways in which hands unconsciously encircle coins, a physical sensation. One man high-spiritedly lets them roll loose, the other deliberately stacks them on top of each other, with greedy precision. The spendthrift and the miser both *feel* the coins between their fingers.

The object of the following capriccio is the invisible stamp of this physical contact in our daily lives—and its gradual disappearance. Its concern is with the experience caught in one of the finest stories by Karen Blixen: 'Mr. Clay said, "The sailor told the others that he had held a five guinea

piece in the palm of his hand, and that he felt the weight and the cold of gold upon it".⁴

It could be that in the near future Benjamin's concept of aura—which in simple terms means that something assumes a particularly intense and melancholy power of fascination at the moment of its disappearance—might apply to money. Are not those of us born before 1990 the last generations that really know money, the last for whom familiarity with it is second nature? Not in the sense of a monetary economy at large—which is certainly not vanishing, but flourishing as never before, indeed celebrating the most disastrous victories—but that of an intimate, daily contact with coinage and banknotes. We have been used to money as an object for so long that it comes as a tiny shock to visualize what will disappear in a monetary system without cash: money (we will soon be saying) 'as we knew it'.

To anticipate this future: contrary to every repetition of *non olet*, it was once possible to be repelled by money (Arno Schmidt: 'out of spite, get all the coins cleaned before touching them';⁵ and in certain exclusive hotels, guests indeed had their money washed overnight). You could also play with it—as a worry bead, or a spinning top on a table. That parents warned: 'Money is not to be played with!' made it even more attractive to children, most of whom at one time or another played a game of skill, not just for but actually *with* money, throwing coins to make them land as close to the foot of a wall as possible. The coin was plaything and reward in one, as posterity will be able to study in old films—think of Steve McQueen in *The Cincinnati Kid* or Danny Aiello in *The Purple Rose of Cairo*. Money was an oracle: heads or tails. A coin could be the prop for big, dramatic gestures—Claude Akins inviting an inebriated Dean Martin to fish his silver dollar out of the spittoon in *Rio Bravo*. In *River of No Return*, Marilyn Monroe singing 'One silver dollar' . . . But it is better

⁴ The journals of Léon Bloy quoted here are collected in *Le Mendiant ingrat* (1892–1895), Paris 1898; *Mon Journal* (1896–1900), Paris 1904; *Quatre ans de captivité à Cochons-sur-Marne* (1900–1904), 1905. References are by date.

⁵ Walt Disney's *Christmas Parade* No. 1, November 1949. This and the following comic books are without pagination.

⁶ Balzac, 'La Maison du Chat qui pelote', *La Comédie humaine I: Études de Mœurs: Scènes de la vie privée*, Paris 1951, p. 48.

⁷ Isak Dinesen/Karen Blixen, 'The Immortal Story', *Anecdotes of Destiny*, London 1958, p. 158.

⁸ Arno Schmidt, *KAFF auch Mare Crisium*, Karlsruhe 1960, p. 256.

to stop here, Westerns alone unleashing a cataract of such recollections, of which readers can no doubt evoke a few of their own.

Among the many celebrated or legendary coins—from Judas's thirty pieces of silver to the doubloon that Ahab nails to the mast—worriedly recalled by the narrator in Borges's 'El Zahir', one of the most striking is that which betrayed a fleeing Louis XVI at Varennes. Embossed on every coin of the realm, the image of the monarch acts as a 'Wanted' poster when the king tries to escape unrecognized. This homecoming of hundreds of thousands of coins to their individual origin has something dizzying about it. The effect is similar to those strange limit-cases of exchange constructed by Stevenson in 'The Bottle Imp', in which the characters need an ever smaller denomination to sell the diabolical object on to the next person for a lower price than they paid for it, or Mark Twain's story 'The £1,000,000 Bank-Note', in which the denomination is so large that you never need to break into it, since no-one can give you change or would even expect to receive money from anyone so rich. Yet the mystery of money lies not so much in such extreme cases as in its mere material existence as a physical object. 'The clerk in Terry Kelly's said *A crown!* but the consignor held out for six shillings, and in the end the six shillings was allowed him literally. He came out of the pawn-office joyfully, making a little cylinder of the coins between his thumb and fingers'—the fleetingly tangible and meaningful object of a vignette in *Dubliners*.⁶ Are we getting closer to 'the riddle of the money fetish' Marx harped upon?

Circulation as sin

On 12 April 1904 Léon Bloy⁷ wrote of his landlady: 'This wretch, whose last hour on earth will no doubt soon be here, will be leaving this

⁶ James Joyce, 'Counterparts', in *The Essential James Joyce*, London 1948, p. 79.

⁷ Léon Bloy (1846–1917) was a critic, ruthless polemicist and writer of prose fictions (Borges included some of his fantastic tales in his *biblioteca de Babel*). As a youthful bohemian in Second Empire Paris his conversion to a radical and mystical Catholicism led him to oppose not only the hated bourgeois world (and a Church forgetful of Christ), but also the literary *beau monde*. His diaries, two novels (*Le Désespéré*, 1886, and *La Femme pauvre*, 1897), acerbic stories and historico-religious treatises (among them *Le Salut par les juifs*, 1892, surely the most astonishing celebration of the Jews ever written by a confirmed anti-semite) form an impressive body of merciless criticism of bourgeois society by an ardently poor and passionate reactionary.

miserable world on her way to the Throne of Judgement with the bread of my innocent children in her yellow-toothed maw.' Rarely has hatred been distilled into such venomous expressions as in the writing of this Catholic mystic of the Belle Epoque. Did he belong to it? *Per negationem*, in his anarchic loathing for a bourgeois world order, a loathing that sprang from a painfully lived spirituality. Who else would have dared to write, after a fire at a charity bazaar in Paris in May 1897, in which a number of aristocratic benefactresses lost their lives:

when reading the first reports of this frightful disaster, I had the clear and delightful sensation of an enormous weight lifted from my soul. Only the low number of victims somewhat diminished my joy. At last, I nevertheless said to myself, at last! AT LAST justice begins to prevail.

In Bloy, arson—in any and every sense—figures as a sublime handiwork. He who also called himself 'the Ungrateful Beggar' wrote of the form of his bourgeois existence: 'Thus I go begging like someone who asks for alms at the door of a farmhouse, only to return and set fire to it later'.⁸

Few people have given as much thought to money as Bloy. He needed to think about it every day since, along with his wife and his children, he was constantly exposed to desperate poverty, which makes his diaries not only a quarry of the most disconcerting ideas, and register of the most raging obloquies, but a chronicle of grotesque disputes with landlords and butchers. 'With deep sighs we empty our children's tiny money-boxes'—'Lack of money mysteriously characterizes my life to such an extent that, even when I don't have any money at all, it seems to *dwindle even further*'.⁹ Moreover, with considerable speculative effort he eventually made money into the centre of a strange mystical theology, which has always remained deeply suspect to the Church. Its central insight is that money is nothing but Christ crucified. The circulation of money is the continuation *in perpetuo* of Christ's suffering upon the cross. From every piece of defiled coinage—all money not given unconditionally to the poor is, and remains, cursed—stares out the face of Christ, punched and spat upon by the rabble. (We should not forget that Bloy took descriptions by Catholic mystics and, in particular, the visions of Anna Katharina Emmerich of Dülmen of the 'agony of our Lord Jesus Christ' for absolute truth.) Money is simultaneously and indissolubly both the curse and the deliverance of the world. The tendering of a few coins

⁸ Bloy, *Journal*, 21 October 1894.

⁹ Bloy, *Journal*, 9 October 1902 and 8 April 1893.

over a shop-counter opens an abyss that reaches to the heart of the universe. For money, which is always extorted from the poor and always withheld from them, is in all truth 'the suffering of Christ': at once never-ending horror and mysterious promise of salvation. The landscape of Bloy's mental universe can only be hinted at here. But rarely has an author developed figures of thought by which to immerse himself with such intensity in the most trivial aspects of his daily life and, at the same time, to distance himself so uncompromisingly from anything to do with the present.

Bloy's writing is strewn with gimlet observations about money. But in a masterly stroke he set the *summa* of his mystical *theologia pecuniae* where one would least expect it—in a work that scans and analyses the commonplaces of the bourgeois world. His *Exégèse des lieux communs* is close to Karl Kraus's technique of satirical quotation. Bloy lets everyone talk their necks into a noose without interrupting them. He simply collects the dismal mottos of bourgeois life and subjects them to what could be described, strange though this might sound, as a technique of mystical satire. He notes what is being said: 'you are a character'—'a heart of gold'—'playing with fire'—'you have to run with the pack'—'you only die once'; and then deciphers the mysterious truth of these phrases, by means of a theology that unrelentingly relates them to the whole—on the grounds that, 'like everything that originates from imbeciles or scoundrels', they must have a deeper meaning. The category of the social unconscious would have been alien to Bloy, but he suggests something similar: an echo of transcendental truth that reverberates compulsively through the void of bourgeois unconsciousness. In the web of these phrases, which have only partial equivalents in English, money looms as large as in Bloy's clairvoyant fantasy: 'time is money'; 'judge him by the colour of his money'; 'put a bit of money to one side'; 'don't turn your nose up at money'—in French, *on ne crache pas sur l'argent*, one does not spit at it. Of the habitual use of '*on*', Bloy writes: 'Every time a bourgeois opens his mouth, this mysterious *on* sounds like a money-bag being dumped heavily on the floor of an adjoining room where someone has been murdered.'¹⁰

Time and again, elevation of the abstract immateriality of money to the level of the mystical leads to sudden, unheard-of intensification of it as

¹⁰ Bloy, *Exégèse des lieux communs*, Première série, Paris 1902; Deuxième série, Paris 1913.

sensual. A passage in Bloy's comment on the phrase *rentrer dans son argent*—burying oneself in one's money might be an approximation—proposes: 'In an insane kind of way, one ought to imagine something like a river or an ocean of money in which people could bathe at a certain time of year. They would talk of the money season, just as they now talk about the season in Trouville or Evian'.¹² To this the reader of today might juxtapose an image utterly foreign to Bloy, yet perhaps secretly and oddly linked to his way of looking at the world. For who else would exclaim, 'I miss my daily bath. My money bath, of course', if not Donald Duck's Uncle Scrooge, the richest duck in the world.

Rolling in gold

Carl Barks's comic-book stories of Uncle Scrooge—a spin-off from the Disney cartoon series—offer a canonical encyclopaedia of libidinous relations to money.¹³ His Scrooge is obviously related to Dickens's miser and kindred *topoi* of European comedy from Molière to Antiquity; but he far surpasses these classical embodiments of avarice. Uncle Scrooge's famous money-bin contains a hilly landscape made out of coins, interspersed with banknotes, in which he spends his time. He likes to announce the ritualized programme of actions the money-drive imposes on him with reiterated phrases: 'I dive around in it like a porpoise—and I burrow through it like a gopher—and I toss it up and let it hit me on the head'. Clearly recognizable in this trio of money joys are three movements of any playful child: leaping into the pond, rummaging under the duvet and—the earliest gesture of delight—tossing toys high up into the air. The impressive massif of Uncle Scrooge's money, the backdrop and punch-line of so many of Barks's stories, might by its sheer volume

¹² Bloy, 'On . . .', *Exégèse*, Première série, CLXXVII.

¹³ Carl Barks (1902–2000) was born and raised on a small farm in rural Oregon. He left school at 14 and worked as a woodcutter, tanner, mule-driver, cowboy, rail repairman and printer's hand. A self-taught cartoonist, he submitted his drawings to magazines across the Midwest and was eventually taken on by the *Calgary Eye-Opener*, in the midst of the Depression. Barks was hired by Walt Disney in 1935 and by 1937 was originating storyboards for Donald Duck. In 1942 he left the studio to work with Western Publishing, which held licences to several Disney characters, including Donald Duck. Barks authored and illustrated comic strips with his duck characters until the 1970s. In Germany, translations of the Barks comics for the weekly *Mickey Maus* magazine were originally done by the art historian Dr Erika Fuchs, who filled Barks's speech bubbles with allusions to Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin and Wagner, along with humorous alliterations and wordplay.

obscure the crucial fact that for Scrooge McDuck ('world's richest duck and darn well going to stay that way') all coins are individual. This gigantic accumulation of 'dough'—to use the idiom of Scrooge's disrespectful antagonists, the Beagle Boys, a gang of safe-crackers for whom indeed only its volume counts (which, according to the magical laws of this narration, in the end prevents them from pulling off a successful robbery)—is for Uncle Scrooge a concentrate of intimacy, in which every item is saturated with memory. Every plunge into the immeasurable pile of money on which he sits and argues with his nephews unearths some particular recollection; 'This silver dollar—1898! I got that in the Klondike! And this dollar—1882! I got that in Montana.'³ Often the memory is of triumphant renunciation: 'Oh, oh! I recognize that dime! It's one I didn't spend at the World's Fair in 1907!'⁴ The recollection always serves to bestow uniqueness upon a coin. Each one is of vital importance. If a disaster befalls his fortune, it is usually through one single coin, for instance the dime that Donald sneeringly throws into his uncle's top hat in *A Christmas for Shacktown*, when Scrooge has gone, as an experiment, to beg in a park before Christmas; this little dime, tossed through the skylight into the jam-packed money bin, causes the whole enormous mass to plunge into the abyss.⁵

Ravenous for every new coin, Scrooge rages: 'I need it to make the pile deeper', as he wallows on the ever-growing heap.⁶ In a world which knows the strictly regulated ballet of flirtation and jealousy, but neither love or sex, his motion is the nearest thing to a sexual act. In a key episode of a classic tale, Uncle Scrooge goes to the doctor because he is not feeling well. The examination shows that his pores are blocked with gold dust. 'Do you roll in gold?' the doctor asks in disbelief. Blushing, Scrooge intimates that he doesn't want to talk about it.⁷ Like an echo, the same question is repeated at the end of the story; again the magnate blushes, with the expression of one whose perversions risk exposure. From a clinical point of view, Scrooge's relationship to money is indeed polymorphously perverse: all his senses partake of his passionate attachment—sight; sound (the jingling of money!); especially smell; even taste (at least when a banknote is being kissed); not to speak of

³ *Uncle Scrooge in Only a Poor Old Man*, Dell Four Color 386, March 1952.

⁴ *Disneyland Birthday Party* No. 1, October 1958 ('Uncle Scrooge and Gyro').

⁵ *A Christmas for Shacktown*, Dell Four Color 367, January–February 1952.

⁶ *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* 124, January 1951.

⁷ *Uncle Scrooge* 8, February 1955.

touch, as he rolls about in his accumulation of hundreds of thousands of coins, each of which, inexplicably, remains 'individual'.

Naturally, such fetishism of every individual coin leads to a total suspension of exchange. Scrooge is not going to hand over any money—to do so is so repugnant to him that, when once forced to spend some money in order to avoid entering a higher tax bracket, he has to employ (and, paradoxically, pay) Donald for the task. Sensual fixation on the money itself eliminates exchange, because the coin is so desirable that nothing can compete with it. (From the other side of the world, the theology of the ungrateful beggar also cancels any principle of exchange: redemption lies in alms alone—*something for nothing*.)

It has sometimes been emphasized how much the stories of Donald and Uncle Scrooge owe to the unstable and impoverished early life of Carl Barks, the graphic artist chiefly responsible for designing the world of Duckburg for the Disney company. Certainly the scenario in which the leading man, Donald Duck, regularly loses his job, is never able to repay the money he borrows, and—he, too—has to break into his nephews' piggy bank when an unexpected yet unavoidable expense bears down, reflects the life-world of the comic-reading public of the day with startling directness. The Ducksaga thus has more in common with burlesque low-life comic strips like Willard's *Moon Mullins* than with other 'funny animals' comics. The universe depicted here with grotesque harshness is one in which financial transactions are conducted almost exclusively in cash (in keeping with Barks's background in the world of the little man, in the era of the wage packet)—all the more strikingly, as the sums become larger. In Duckburg, cash is pushed across the counter; if a significant acquisition is involved—the purchase of a car, a hotel or a racehorse—then an entire sack of money crashes onto the table, or you hear the slap of thick wads of banknotes. Cashless transactions are meaningless. If they feature at some point, then the cheque is immediately turned into an *object* again—a quiddity of paper on which, in a hotel fire for example, the ink of the signature is smudged by the sprinkler system.

In such episodes the cheque, too, serves as the prop in a comedy, as elsewhere the receipted IOU or the bundle of valuable stocks and shares inside a safe that cannot be opened: objects that have the same melodramatic function as the mysterious papers in Victorian novels—wills, love-letters, evidence of secret marriages or hushed-up births—which are not just

documents but enigmatically vibrating generators of action. Yet in Barks their importance to the story is limited. Large sums are represented by coins, served up as a metallically sparkling heap of money from which, here and there, green banknotes poke out like decorative lettuce leaves on restaurant platters—an analogy that is indeed the punchline of the plot in one story ('How Green Was My Lettuce').¹⁸ In Duckburg's quiz shows you can win a barrel of money. When Uncle Scrooge crosses the street with a wheelbarrow full of money, the passers-by are pleasantly excited rather than surprised. 'What a character'—'Wotcha got there, pop?'—'Is it for real?'

Lost gestures

What is all this supposed to mean? I believe it is a piece of the historical past of the money experience as well as of individual memory residue, focused in the burning-glass of an unbridled comic imagination. Scrooge's money-gestures—to some extent those of all Duckburg's inhabitants—preserve patterns of behaviour from times of old (biting the suspect coin to find out whether it is counterfeit) as well as a rich repertoire of childhood experiences. Scrooge's privileged Super-Coin—the legendary lucky 'first dime'—is something like a congealed memory of the incomprehensible attraction that money may have for a child who is not yet familiar with it. The dime is the central cult object in Scrooge's collection, and its magical powers are highlighted by the unending interest that the witch *Magica De Spell* takes in it. These powers, though, accrue to it precisely because it is otherwise nondescript; other exhibits singled out as 'my first dollar' or 'my first million' do not possess them. A passage from 'Tales of Our Schooldays' by Machado de Assis may shed some light on this magic spell:

Carefully, he produced [the silver coin] and showed it to me from a distance. It was a coin from the days of the King, probably twelve *vinéns* or two *tozões*, I don't remember exactly; however, it was a coin, and such a coin that my heart began to pound wildly . . . I wanted to keep it at home, telling my mother I had found it in the street. I was feeling it all over so it wouldn't get lost, rubbing my fingers over its embossed surface, almost reading its inscription by touch alone, and had the burning desire to peer at it.¹⁹

¹⁸ *Uncle Scrooge* 51, August 1964.

¹⁹ Machado de Assis, 'Conto de escola', in *Obras completas*, vol. II, Rio de Janeiro 1962, p. 551.

It seems that in the counter, parallel, ideal and delusionary world of Duckburg all manner of sensuous everyday gestures and childhood myths congregate under the rubric of 'money'. These are, of course, linked to the fairy-tale figure of Uncle Scrooge, but along with his unimaginable wealth, there is also the conspicuous other end of the spectrum of financial existence: Donald's eternally precarious lack of means ('Uncle Donald, have you got any rare coins?'—'Kids, *any* coins I get are rare coins!'²⁰). Abundance and scarcity are experienced at close range in these stories. Money hurtles around people's ears, rolls away down steep slopes, rains down from the sky, disappears down a drain, is hidden and found, freezes and melts. The brazen jingle of money on the counter, the glinting coin abducted by a bird or flattened by a steamroller (like the pennies of one's childhood, illicitly planted on tram lines), the legend of the rare mis-struck piece, the dime swallowed by a small child, the banknote gnawed by a rat—we are in a world where our experience of money is extremely haptic and attracts all kinds of rumours and legends. Fine in its naive affectivity is the way the Duck family, after a stroke of luck or a successful coup, tends to kiss the coin or the banknote so easily and unexpectedly come by, or acquired through hard work (plump little red hearts fly all around this touch of the lips). In such enthusiastic appropriation, the elated possessor reacts not so much to cash value, as to the sum of his adventure with this singular piece of money—a quite particular unit of currency.

Does it make sense to hang the two strange parts of this diptych side by side? Perhaps it does. Bloy and Barks undertook, I believe, the most consistent subversions of the abstract exchange embodied in money that have ever been attempted in literature. For Bloy, every cash payment was made to appear as an outrageous metaphysical scandal, a monstrous cosmic mystery: Christ feels every purchase like a punch in the face. For Barks, the matter-of-fact tones of a fairy-tale helped show the reversion of monetary currency to a fetish object: Scrooge knows every coin personally. If you imagine—blasphemously—drawing a line between these extreme positions, they intersect at the bewildering point at which each monetary transaction becomes again something irreducibly particular, unique. This may seem banal, but is in fact totally outrageous. For our entire economic existence is based on the equalization of every act of exchange into a uniform continuum in which everything specific

²⁰ *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* 130, July 1951.

(effort, accident, power) gets lost. The remnants of some particularity in money (like the tear in the banknote; or the unbelievably rare fifty-cent piece with the stamp of a certain mint, of which children speak only in whispers) once perhaps left an absurd, minuscule space for reflection, in which this pure equality was still clouded or questionable. It will now be closed.

You could still compare a coin to the moon—poets have done so in days gone by. The coin itself remains, astonishingly, one of the few objects of perception continually and immediately surrounding us which, through long-established habits and fantasies, connect us across the millennia to Antiquity—like bread and wine, our shoes, the dog, the knife, indeed the moon. Now poetry is not everyone's cup of tea, and it may be thought no great change if, in the near future, metaphors to do with coins no longer direct us to our everyday lives but to the historical prop-room where lyres and swords are hung. There is, however, another kind of poetry in the familiarity which slips into the unconscious of our daily doings. What will change are small gestures, ordinary experiences of contact with others. Everyone can compile their own small list. You no longer have the satisfaction of putting the correctly counted-out sum on the shop counter, and being thanked by the sales assistant. You don't get change counted out into your palm any more. You will no longer find foreign coins in your pocket. Formerly, passers-by would often ask for small change to use in a telephone booth: this microscopic interaction was probably the first victim of the era of the credit card.

The result will be a momentous trifle: certain gestures will no longer be possible. You can throw the money owed an impertinent creditor at his feet in cash, but you cannot make an electronic bank transfer contemptuously. Historically, of course, numerous gestures have already disappeared, but for the most part, others have taken their place—there probably are less 'characteristic hand movements' on a steamer than on a sailing ship, but there are some. What will take the place of the extensive repertoire of gestures associated with coins and banknotes? You can flirt promisingly with a credit card, make a show of the platinum version when paying in a restaurant, but this is merely a derivation; you can do it just as well—if not better—with crisp, high denomination banknotes or with a bulging (or elegantly slim) wallet. I can think of only one distinctive gesture (I believe it can be attributed to the early days of the credit card, especially in the United States), but it has something

woefully ridiculous, indeed often ruefully self-mocking about it: the vertical dropping down of a long, linked row of plastic compartments filled with credit cards, ten, twenty, *I've got them all*. And then, yes, another gesture of aporia: that helpless, absurd, but irrepressible reaching out into the void when the cash dispenser confiscates an insolvent card. This is a gesture on the dividing-line between two epochs; on this line stands, of course, the cash machine that still yields, against the card, those—archaic—banknotes. You want to clasp the money in your fingers, and instead: nothing. This silent response is extremely powerful. (The unexpected disappearance of cards or tickets in vending-machines seems, incidentally, to be an experience that often induces people to start talking to the apparatus.) However, this scene stands sublimely alone; the credit card is not an object that generates gestures.

I have no idea whether this further step—‘naturally’ inevitable, for a consistent capitalism—into exchange abstraction, the contemptuous stripping of any vestiges of concretion from money, will make it any easier for us to see through what used to be called the *Verblendungs-zusammenhang*, the blinding universal delusion generated by alienation. (That the pathos of this formula now seems very strange to us may be an indication that the delusion has indeed become universal.) The more extreme abstraction just holds another secret, the *true* mystery of money, people will claim. That goes without saying. But the tiny disappearing mystery of the coin did hold a particular paradox, grounded in its intertwining of the sensuous and the abstract—the persistence of small, foolish, yet also magical incursions of pleasure into the great stream of abstractions that is circulation. Will we sometimes think back to that ‘also’ as a missed opportunity for everyday reflection? Charon demands coins as his reward, with which we therefore close the eyes of the dead.

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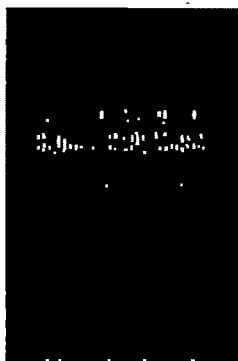
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A. SIVANANDAN

AN ISLAND TRAGEDY

Buddhist Ethnic Cleansing in Sri Lanka

Could you tell us about your origins and background?

I WAS BORN IN Colombo in 1923, but my father's family were tenant farmers from the village of Sandilipay in Jaffna Province. The north of the island is flat and arid—there are no trees, no rivers, no mountains. My grandfather had so little land, and such poor land, that the only thing he grew was children: he had thirteen in all, but seven died in childbirth or very young. He was so fertile that he was known locally as the farmer with a green penis. My father was the second-youngest of thirteen. He was very bright, did very well at the local school, and won a scholarship to a Catholic school in Colombo. Education was the only route to jobs and social advancement for Tamils. Under British colonial rule, many Tamils were sent to fill bureaucratic posts in one or another malarial station in the interior, to open up the country, as it were. My father, who was educated at primary school in Tamil and English, joined the postal service at the age of sixteen, to support his family. By the time I was born, he was a sub-postmaster in Kandy, but throughout my childhood he was often transferred from one place to another. So when I was ten or eleven, I was sent to Colombo, to attend St Joseph's College. It was a big Catholic school in the middle of the city, but surrounded by narrow streets and slums, through which rich people travelled to attend classes.

Were there any particular teachers who influenced you?

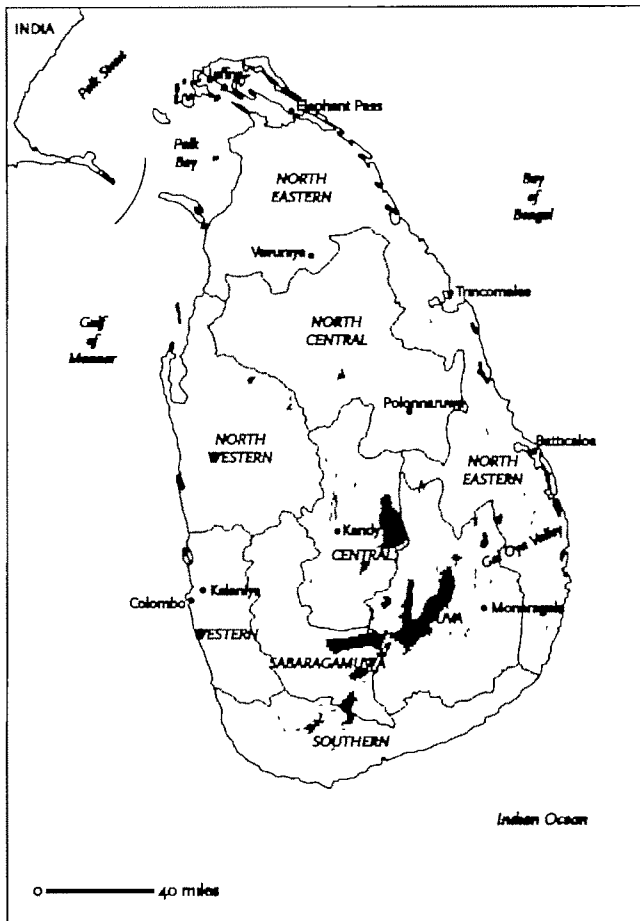
The head of the school was a Frenchman called Le Goc, a renowned botanist and scholar who was very broad-minded, though the school regime

itself was strict in other respects. He was very good to poor students—I was allowed in on half-fees because my family couldn't afford the full rate. My English teacher really stimulated me—J. P. de Fonseka, a Burgher of Portuguese descent who had been G. K. Chesterton's editor and friend during his time in Britain. De Fonseka gave me a taste for language: English sat on my tongue, I could taste it together with the Tamil I spoke at home. I was also a very religious lad, and went to Hindu temple every Friday and enthusiastically sang the *thevarams*, Tamil devotional songs. So I had a Tamil-Hindu cultural base with an English education superimposed on it—in a way, reflecting the structure of Ceylonese society at the time.

Could you briefly characterize the historical peculiarities of the country, and its various social formations?

When the Europeans first intruded in the early 16th century there were three separate kingdoms, covering the south-eastern highlands, the coastal areas and the barren North. The Kandyan kingdom in the South-east was mainly Sinhala and Buddhist, as were the maritime regions, though here there was more of a mixture of 'races'—Arabs, a trading community of 'coastal Moors' from Kerala, and subsequently the Burghers, descended from mixed marriages between Dutch or Portuguese colonists and Ceylonese. The North was predominantly Tamil, and Hindu, though the rigidities of the caste system meant that, from the 17th century onwards, Christian missionaries made more inroads here than elsewhere. In terms of social structure, the Kandyan realm was dominated by a feudal, landowning aristocracy, almost entirely Sinhala, while the western coast possessed a mixed merchant class. In the North, the land was owned by the high caste *vellala*, who were also the most numerous; land-holdings tended to be small and fragment over time—so there were no big Tamil landlords.

The colonial period stretched over some 450 years, and was shared out more or less equally between the Portuguese, Dutch and British. But where the first two had largely engaged in mercantile activities, carving out enclaves in order to ship out the island's riches—above all its cinnamon—the British gained full control over the whole of Ceylon, in 1815. Not long thereafter, they began to import indentured Indian Tamil labour to work the coffee plantations they established in the interior—inserting another social order into the existing set of structures, a colony



within a colony. By the end of the 19th century, the main crop was tea, and the plantation mode had begun to dominate the economy, requiring a whole infrastructure of railways and roads for its produce to reach world markets. Colonial capitalism needed the island to be unified as an economic unit, but it did not want the different communities to come together in any other sense. The British strategy was to divide politically in order to integrate economically. One of the main instruments for this was to provide Tamils with educational opportunities and use them to staff the administrative apparatus. While economic wealth remained in the hands of the old Sinhala feudal elite, the public services, train stations, post offices and so on were all run by Tamils. This

created resentments among the Sinhalese, who formed the majority of the population, and also prevented a unified anti-colonial movement from taking shape.

You came of age towards the end of the colonial period?

Yes, I finished school in 1942, and went to University College Colombo, which had become the University of Ceylon that year. Education was free by this time—under the Donoughmore Constitution of 1931, Ceylon had been granted universal suffrage and could elect its own government; the education minister, C. W. W. Kannangara, a brilliant man, introduced free education in 1939. Even before independence, we had the trappings of democracy, high literacy rates and free medicine. This also probably played some role in undercutting anti-colonial currents: when Ceylon got its independence in 1948, it was more on the back of the Indian nationalist struggle than through any *swaraj* movement of its own. The British saw it as a model colony, with an English-educated and entirely compliant elite, deserving of self-government.

What were your first memories in the sense of being a Tamil in the south?

I had no sense of being a Tamil.

No sense?

I had no sense at all of being a Tamil.

At what stage were you radicalized?

At university. Some of my teachers there were prominent intellectuals in the Lanka Sama Samaja Party—notably N. M. Perera, who lectured on the Soviet constitution, and Doric de Souza on English literature. The LSSP had been founded in 1935. Many of its leaders were doctors who had played a front-line role in treating the poor during a malaria epidemic in 1934–35: they opened free dispensaries in the countryside, handing out balls of quinine mixed with some local Ayurvedic medicine. Others of them had been students of Harold Laski at the London School of Economics during the thirties, and had also been influenced by the Indian nationalist movement. The LSSP's programme initially was simply one of helping the poor, rather than developing workers'

consciousness, but I feel that this gradually came about during the 1930s and 40s, among a peasant class that had one foot still in the land, but parts of which began to see themselves as an urban proletariat. The LSSP certainly had a mass following, aided by relatively high literacy rates. It's also worth pointing out that Ceylon was the only country in the world where the largest left party was Trotskyist, and where the CP split off from it rather than vice versa.

After graduating I went to teach in the hill country, in the estate areas. The children were a mixture of Sinhalese and plantation Tamils, and I learnt a lot about plantation society by visiting their parents' houses—row upon row of shacks, known as 'coolie lines'. But the headmaster thought I was becoming too friendly with them, and got rid of me quickly enough. I then taught in Kandy, at Dharmaraja College, a Buddhist school, but got in trouble again for allowing the sixth-formers to smoke and teaching them about Marxism. Around 1950 I came under pressure from my father to make a proper living, and went to work at the Bank of Ceylon.

How would you describe the political dynamics of the period immediately after independence, and its significance for what followed?

The first steps towards ethnic cleansing were taken under the government of D. S. Senanayake, in 1949. One of his first measures as prime minister was to disenfranchise the 'plantation Tamils'; though many of them had been there for three or four generations, those who had not already registered as citizens were told they could not gain citizenship, and would not have the vote. At a stroke, this removed around a tenth of the population from political life, and established a Sinhalese electoral majority in the upcountry areas. Senanayake then followed this with colonization schemes settling Sinhalese peasants in the mainly Tamil-speaking North-east, which altered the demographic balance of the region as well. The Sinhala feudal elite remained firmly in control at this stage, running the country along dynastic lines: Senanayake's cabinet included his son Dudley, his cousin J. R. Jayawardene, and two of his nephews, Sir John Kotelawala and R. G. Senanayake; Dudley Senanayake and Kotelawala both subsequently got to be prime minister too. Hence the ruling United National Party was popularly referred to as the Uncle Nephew Party.

Another important pattern was laid down in 1953, after Dudley Senanayake had ended subsidized rice for the poor. The LSSP and CP joined together and called for a nationwide work stoppage—a *hartal*—which brought everything to a standstill. It was such a success that the cabinet, fearing for their lives, fled onto a ship in Colombo harbour and called for talks. This was the very height of civil protest and resistance; the whole country was united by the strike. But then the Left simply caved in: they agreed to talks with the government, and then allowed it to return to power even though they had gained nothing. The LSSP and CP by this time had an entirely middle-class leadership, and they seemed to take fright at their success. I think the Left's subsequent degeneration can be traced back to this moment.

But the real breakthrough, in a negative sense, came with the elections of 1956, when Solomon West Ridgeway Dias Bandaranaike used the politics of communalism to break open the UNP's dynastic monopoly. He was also from the Sinhala elite, but too distant a relative to be guaranteed a turn in office. His name, by the way, reflects the mutant, hybrid nature of his class—Joseph West Ridgeway was the British governor of Ceylon around the turn of the century, and a close friend of Solomon's mother. Bandaranaike had a Christian upbringing, and was educated at Oxford, but by the early 50s he had become a Buddhist nationalist, crying 'Sinhala for the Sinhalese!' He had realized that playing the cards of language and religion would provide him with a ready-made electoral majority: Sinhala-speakers were around 70 per cent of the population. So he formed the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) in 1951, and began to advance a twin platform of making Sinhala the official language and Buddhism the state religion.

These were the keys to Bandaranaike's success in the 1956 campaign—along with the Left's opportunist decision not to contest seats against the SLFP, on the grounds that, if the SLFP wasn't quite socialist, at least it wasn't the UNP. The UNP had also joined the communalist game—there was a Dutch auction in which it promised to make Sinhala the sole official language within five days; Bandaranaike outbid them by saying he would do it within 24 hours. All government servants would have to conduct business in Sinhala by a certain deadline or lose their jobs, and Sinhala was to be the medium of instruction in schools. This obviously struck at the heart of Tamils' livelihoods: due to the lack of opportunities in the North and to British divide-and-rule policies, Tamils were

over-represented in the professions and administrative apparatus. But more than this, the Official Language Act removed the linguistic rights of fully a fifth of the country's population, and downgraded the Tamil language itself—an ancient language, predating Sanskrit and Pali, with an extraordinarily rich literary tradition. In early June of 1956, Tamils gathered in protest against the Act on Galle Face Green in Colombo, and were beaten by a Sinhala mob, egged on by Bandaranaike's supporters. Violence spread to other parts of the country; as many as 150 Tamils were killed by Sinhala settlers in Gal Oya valley in Eastern Province. Now it was not just Tamil votes or language rights that were at stake, but Tamil lives. This was the start of the two tracks towards ethnic cleansing: the official and the unofficial, parliamentary and extra-parliamentary, each overlapping and reinforcing the other.

The Bandaranaike period—from his election in 1956 to his assassination in 1959, and including the horrific pogroms of 1958—seems crucial to everything that followed, including the current spell of ethnic cleansing. What were the mechanisms driving developments in this period?

Several significant trends came to the fore at this time: the emergence of goon-squads answering to one or other elite figure trying to stir up communal tensions; the politicization of the Buddhist monks and the birth of an unpleasant religious fundamentalism; and the process of electoral bargaining between the party in power and the Federal Party, which had been set up by Tamils in the late 40s, initially to press for greater representation. After the violence sparked by the Official Language Act, Bandaranaike was caught between his nationalist rhetoric and his loose social-democratic principles. He vacillated. In 1957 he made a pact with the Federal Party to allow the official use of Tamil in Northern and Eastern Provinces, and provide some measure of regional autonomy. But now the very communalist forces Bandaranaike had fostered began to turn against him. The Buddhist *sangha* in Ceylon was dominated by two main temples, in Kandy and Kelaniya, whose high priests were very wealthy figures with enormous influence in the countryside, much of it malign. The Kelaniya high priest, Buddharakkhita Thero, was renowned for his venality and greed. Bandaranaike had drafted in the *bhikkus* to help him win the 1956 elections, and they had acquired a taste for political intrigue and power. Every concession Bandaranaike made to the Tamils was countered by the monks and Sinhala chauvinists. In April 1958, scores of *bhikkus* and hundreds more protestors surrounded the

Prime Minister's residence, forcing him to renounce his latest pact with the Federal Party. Meanwhile, peaceful Tamil demonstrations were met with police violence or beatings from private armies of *goondas*.

In May 1958, Tamils travelling to the Federal Party convention in Vavuniya in the North were ambushed by goon squads at Polonnaruwa. This was just the beginning of a wave of violence across the country, in which any retaliation from Tamils was met with even greater brutality by Sinhalese mobs. Scores of Tamils were dragged from buses or cars and murdered, while others were killed in sugar-cane fields; Tamil houses and businesses were burnt. Four days into the pogroms, the Prime Minister addressed the nation over the radio, and blamed the 'lawlessness' on the death of one Sinhala businessman in Batticaloa. This only sparked more atrocities, and eventually a state of emergency was declared and troops were brought out to 'restore order'. As many as 12,000 Tamils fled the South as refugees—by ship, since the roads and railways were not safe. Federalist leaders were rounded up and detained. Bandaranaike, meanwhile, was undone the following year by the chauvinist forces he had unleashed: when he proposed that 'reasonable use' of Tamil be allowed, this partial retreat was too much for the *bhikkus*—he was assassinated by a monk in September 1959, at the instigation of Buddharakkhita Thero. Buddhism is seen in the West as benign and peaceful. The history of my island teaches otherwise.

Where were you at the time? What was your experience of the 1958 pogroms?

I was working in Colombo, managing the foreign department of the Bank of Ceylon, and living in a posh area of the city with my wife and three children. I was at the house of a friend nearby when my brother arrived, his shirt torn, and said our father's house had been attacked—he had just managed to get through a crowd of a hundred and fifty people. So my brother and I went back down there in our car; I had a police baton which I'd stolen from a cop in my student days, and dressed myself in khaki shirt and shorts, thinking I could pass myself off as a policeman. My Sinhala was pretty good—my wife was a Sinhalese Catholic—so I shouted that people should move aside, and we managed to inch our way through the crowd. When we got to the house, we told everyone there to get ready to leave. One relative insisted on staying—'An Englishman's home is his castle', he said, like a typical product of the English school

system—but we put the children in the car and took them to my house. All in all we had about twenty or thirty people camped out there, refugees in their own city.

Another, small incident really shook me at the time. I was with my eldest daughter, who had only just started school, and we saw an unfamiliar man coming out of my mother-in-law's house. I said: 'Who is that uncle?'—that being the term we use for almost everybody. She was only four or five, and said in Sinhalese: 'That's not an uncle, that's a Tamil.' I decided I had to leave—I couldn't live in this place any more.¹ I left for Britain—and walked straight into the Notting Hill riots! These different, yet complementary, experiences of discrimination on two different islands pushed me to study the root causes of racial, class and caste prejudices, and have informed much of my work ever since at the Institute of Race Relations and in our journal, *Race & Class*.

What happened in the aftermath of Bandaranaike's assassination? Did it give the elite pause for reflection, or did it have the opposite effect—encouraging them to take further anti-Tamil measures and finish the job?

After Bandaranaike's death, they brought back capital punishment—that in itself tells you a great deal. Bandaranaike's widow, Sirimavo Ratwatte, took over the leadership of the SLFP, and won elections in 1960, in coalition with the LSSP and CP. She continued the pattern that had been established under her husband—racist legislation, followed by Tamil resistance, prompting conciliatory gestures from the government, which were then rejected by Sinhala nationalist priests and politicians, who unleashed anti-Tamil riots. One of the first acts of her coalition government was to come up with a plan to repatriate the Tamil plantation workers. They had been stateless for a decade and a half, but were at least allowed to stay; now, under the Sirimavo-Shastri pact of 1964 between Mrs Bandaranaike's government and India, 300,000 disenfranchised Tamils were to be given citizenship, while almost twice that number—525,000—would be shipped across the Palk Strait to India. Mrs Bandaranaike also continued the policy of demographic change, settling Sinhalese peasants in Eastern Province in large numbers.

¹ Sivanandan's semi-autobiographical novel, *When Memory Dies*, London 1997, gives a fictionalized account of 1958, within a portrait of the country spanning three generations.

If Solomon Bandaranaike had cut out the Tamils' mother-tongue, Sirimavo brought them to their knees. She used the provisions of the earlier language acts to remove Tamils from the police, army, courts and government apparatus in general, on the grounds that Tamils were over-represented. The United Front governments' policies of nationalization and import-substitution, with a state bureaucracy controlling the import-export business, created a wealth of corporatized—and communalized—structures. Patronage, permits and credit were doled out for the benefit of Sinhala voters; Tamils could rarely find jobs in the public sector, and Tamil entrepreneurs were starved of credit. Then, in Bandaranaike's second term, from 1970–77, came the campaign for 'standardization': she decided that, to correct the under-representation of Sinhalese in the professions, Tamil students would henceforth need to get higher marks than Sinhalese in order to attend university, medical college and so on. At a stroke, she cut the ground from under the feet of Tamil youth. Up till then, they had not been affected directly, and had followed in their fathers' footsteps—arguing for peace talks, reconciliation, federal arrangements. But now their land had been taken from them, and then their language, and finally their chances of earning a living: they had been robbed of their future. Tamil youths saw that the electoral-bargaining approach of the Federal Party had produced no results, and they had no allies in the South: the LSSP, to its eternal disgrace, was part of Mrs Bandaranaike's racist coalition government. It was only at this stage that the Tamils took up arms: when they had no other choice.

The speed with which the Sinhalese Left parties degenerated is breathtaking. What happened to the LSSP?

If the LSSP had caved in during the 1953 strike out of passivity or fear, that certainly wasn't the case thereafter: the Left played an active role in the communalization of the Sinhala working class. They essentially went along with the anti-Tamil measures of both Solomon and Sirimavo Bandaranaike, in exchange for promises to nationalize the plantations and bogus anti-colonial rhetoric. The LSSP abstained in the vote on Bandaranaike's anti-Tamil measures in 1964 in order to remain part of the government coalition—and was promptly and correctly expelled from the Fourth International. But they stuck to the same course, and LSSP leaders played key roles in the sorry story that followed. When Bandaranaike was re-elected in 1970, it was Colvin R. de Silva, one of

the founder-members of the LSSP, who drafted the new constitution enshrining Sinhala chauvinism—notably in the change of the country's name to 'Holy Lanka'. He was also made Minister of Plantations, while N. M. Perera, another of the party's founders and once a Trotskyist theoretician (and my lecturer), served as Finance Minister, and went cap in hand to the IMF for loans to bail out the Bandaranaike government.

At this time, a decline in the prices of Ceylon's primary exports—tea, rubber, coconuts—brought worsening terms of trade, a rising import bill and a huge increase in foreign debt. The dire state of the country's economy was one of the main factors behind the radicalization of Sinhala youth. By the late 60s, unemployment was running at around 14 per cent, which hit young people particularly hard. The Janata Vimukhti Peramuna (People's Liberation Front) was formed in 1965 by young Sinhalese Marxists, as a split from the pro-Chinese Communist Party. It spent the next five years organizing clandestinely in the Sinhala Buddhist heartland in the south of the island. The JVP came out into the open during the elections of 1970, when it became clear they had substantial mass support among Sinhala peasants. But they had not made such inroads in the southern lowlands, nor among Tamils in the North and East; in fact, they had not addressed the Tamil question except to put forward a thesis on 'Indian expansionism', which served only to stir up animosity against the plantation workers. When they carried out an armed insurrection in April 1971, the government responded with fierce repression—helped by the full complement of outside powers: Britain, the US, the Soviet Union, China, India, Pakistan, Yugoslavia all offered their assistance. Thousands of Sinhala youths were massacred by the police and army; there were bodies floating in the rivers. René Dumont was in Ceylon at the time and estimated up to 8,000 were killed, and another 14,000 were detained. And the old Left participated fully in the repression, demonstrating its utter debasement: the LSSP, CP and Bandaranaike were united in crushing the JVP. Your magazine wrote about all this at the time.² The repression also showed that the ruling elite was not going to tolerate opposition of any kind. It was a clear sign to any Tamil group that might be considering doing the same—and a dry-run for what was to come when they did.

² See Fred Halliday, 'The Ceylonese Insurrection', *NLR* 1/69, Sept–Oct 1971; see also the speech by JVP founder-member Rohan Wijeweera at his trial in 1973, reproduced in *NLR* 1/84, Mar–Apr 1974.

The Tamils' turn to armed struggle, then, took place in a context where the old Left had been totally discredited, Sinhalese radical youth decimated by repression, and the Federal Party had been unable to achieve anything. How did the Tamil nationalist movement develop over the course of the 1970s?

The Tamil bourgeois parties formed themselves into a Tamil United Front in the early 70s, but otherwise did nothing. So Tamil youths decided to take on the Sinhala state, starting with one or two bank robberies and raids on police stations. They would make their getaway on bicycles, through the *olungais*—mazes of narrow lanes fenced in with the huge fan-like leaves from the palmyra tree. The state stepped up its repression, but the Tamil elders closed ranks behind 'their boys'. Tamils had always been stereotyped as a docile people, not a martial race, and so on, but the 'boys' had raised them from their knees, and they kept faith with them. In 1975, the Tamil New Tigers, set up three years before, assassinated the pro-SLFP mayor of Jaffna—which brought a wave of arrests and torture from the police, and which in turn drove the new movement underground. By this time the Tamil Unity Front had added the word Liberation to its name, and in 1976 the TNT gave way to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. There was no question of regional autonomy any more: this was a movement for a separate state.

Presumably the fear created by the ruthlessness of the Sinhala elite in crushing the JVP uprising was offset, for the Tamil national movement, by the success of Bangladesh in securing independence in 1971, though the final triumph was made possible only by the Indian military intervention?

Very much so—many of them firmly expected India would come and help them too, especially as there were 60 million Tamils in Tamil Nadu. But they also harked back to the glorious past when Tamils had had their own kingdoms in Ceylon itself. This made for a strange marriage of bourgeois-romantic historicism with radical Marxist ideas that generated more and more contradictions as time went by.

The Jayawardene government's passage of the Prevention of Terrorism Act in 1979 seems a crucial turning point. What was the lead-up to this, and what were its consequences?

J. R. Jayawardene had come to power after elections in 1977, promising 'righteous' government, the rule of law, a free press and steps to

address Tamil grievances. Rational though this last element might have been from the point of view of capitalist interests, the same forces that brought Jayawardene to power would prevent him from seriously addressing it—several of his cabinet ministers were avowed Sinhala supremacists. Within weeks of his entering office, the police burnt down Jaffna bazaar, supposedly in retaliation for not being allowed into a carnival. The government simply turned a blind eye to the wave of anti-Tamil violence that followed, in which scores were killed and thousands made refugees—Tamil plantation workers above all. Jayawardene's response was to impose curfews, while that of Tamil youths was to carry out reprisal attacks on policemen. A constant barrage of anti-Tamil rhetoric in parliament and the press created a climate in which anything bad that happened in the North, from bank robbery to common assault, came to be described as 'terrorism'. The killing of a policeman in Jaffna in 1979 allowed Jayawardene to declare a state of emergency and pass the PTA, which allowed civilians to be imprisoned and tortured with official sanction. The army was sent to Jaffna with instructions to 'wipe out terrorism in six months'. From then on, it was a struggle between the Tamils and an occupying army.

Repression drove the civilian population further into the arms of the militant groups, all demanding a separate Tamil state of Eelam. In 1981, Jayawardene organized local elections to District Development Councils, as a political carrot alongside the military stick. But after a (Tamil) UNP candidate was killed that May, the police and army went on the rampage, burning down Jaffna library. This was the epicentre of Tamil learning and culture, with a monumental collection of rare books and *ola* manuscripts—ancient texts written on dried palm-leaves. This was not just a terrible act of vandalism, it was an attempt to wipe out the heritage of an entire people.

The DDC elections went ahead, but despite the government's attempts at rigging, the UNP didn't win a single seat in the North—the TULF took them all. Southern politicians once more incited violence against Tamils in the South and East, and once again the brunt of the attacks, carried out by private armies but in government buses, was borne by Tamil plantation workers. This was just a taste of the horrors yet to come, however. In 1983, after the Tigers had killed 13 soldiers in Jaffna, the government displayed the bodies in Colombo. This fired up the Sinhala chauvinists, and the mob was unleashed all over the country—in several

cases with voter registration lists in hand, so it is obvious there was official support for the pogroms. July and August brought countless acts of brutality, as several hundred Tamils were killed, thousands burned out of their homes; over 50 Tamils being held under the PTA were slaughtered in their cells in Colombo's Welikade prison. This was when the civil war began in earnest.

The war itself seems to have gone through a recurrent cycle during the 1980s and 90s, in which fighting would alternate with ceasefires, but neither side could decisively press home its advantage.

Yes, there were phases in which each side, government and guerrillas, would ratchet up military activities, and then there would be occasional pauses for 'talks' or mediation, during which both sides would re-arm, coming out still more intransigent than before. Where before the state had allowed or encouraged ethnic cleansing to be carried out against Tamils by civilians, now there was a state policy: thugs in the pay of the Minister of Industries drove plantation Tamils from their houses, taking them in government-provided trucks and dumping them hundreds of miles away. Refugee camps were attacked, their inhabitants killed or expelled. Jayawardene stepped up the war in 1986, and besieged Jaffna in 1987—whereupon the Indian government, under pressure from its own Tamils, began to call for a settlement. That year, Rajiv Gandhi and Jayawardene signed an accord under which an Indian Peace-Keeping Force would disarm the Tamil fighters and impose a peace. Three years later, the IPKF had taken over from the Sri Lankan army in its war against the Tamils—civilians were now being massacred by Indian troops instead. A political disaster, the IPKF was militarily defeated by the Tigers, and forced to withdraw in 1990. The following year, Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by the LTTE—an act that alienated the Tamils in India and helped to isolate the Tigers from what could have been a natural base of support.

The adoption of such tactics as assassinations and suicide bombings seemed to indicate a degeneration of the LTTE. How would you characterize its evolution, and that of its support base, during this period?

The degeneration began relatively early, in fact. The various Tamil groups that appeared in the late 70s and early 80s—not just the LTTE, but also the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam, the Eelam

People's Revolutionary Liberation Front, the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization—all had the same end goal, but they had very different ideas of how to go about it. Divisions appeared, and the groups began to fight amongst themselves, with the Tigers taking the lead in eliminating anyone who stood in their way. Instead of winning over people who disagreed with them, they wiped them out. In areas they controlled, they started imposing summary justice—hanging thieves from lampposts, for example—and in 1990 expelled the Muslims from the Northern Province, carrying out their own version of ethnic cleansing. The Tigers had begun to alienate the Tamil population, and gradually ceased having the support of the whole community. The Tigers had their own administrative system—courts, taxation, a sort of police force—but the political dimension of their struggle had been subordinated to an ad hoc militarism; the military tail had begun to wag the political dog. This was ultimately self-defeating, as were the assassinations they carried out—first Rajiv Gandhi, then Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa in 1993. Unlike the resistance movements in Algeria, Vietnam, the Portuguese colonies in Africa and Bangladesh, the Tigers were politically underdeveloped and militarily overdetermined. Weaponry was in command, not politics. This was a critical weakness, and it created the conditions for the final defeat in 2009. They missed many opportunities.

Chandrika Kumaratunga, daughter of Solomon and Sirimavo Bandaranaike, was elected Sri Lankan prime minister in 1994, and briefly made overtures to the LTTE; but the ceasefire fell apart, and the Sri Lankan government once again reverted to an all-out military strategy, retaking large parts of the North. But the LTTE fought back, and by the end of the decade controlled the main Tamil areas of the country, and in 2000 took the significant military base at Elephant Pass. These losses by the Sri Lankan side convinced the new prime minister, Ranil Wickremasinghe, to agree to another truce in 2002, which Norwegian mediators were asked to monitor. At this point, remarkably, the LTTE dropped its demands for a separate state, saying regional autonomy would be enough. It seems to me that these talks could have succeeded, but the government changed during the negotiations (from the UNP to the SLFP), and the new government rejected out of hand the LTTE's demand for an interim self-governing authority in the North and the East. The ceasefire frayed after 2005, and the newly elected president, Mahinda Rajapakse, called for a massive military offensive. Clearly differences within the LTTE led to this impasse.

The defection in 2004 of Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan, a senior LTTE figure, to the Sri Lankan side seems to have been crucial to the subsequent unravelling of the Tigers, from the breakdown of the ceasefire after 2005 to the final Sri Lanka Army assault on the North in 2009. How did this come about, and what motivated Muralitharan to switch sides?

This was the Tigers' final self-defeat: Muralitharan had been the main military strategist and second-in-command to the LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran; his *nom de guerre* was Karuna. It was he who had first recruited children to fight for the LTTE. The reason he gave for splitting in 2004 was that Prabhakaran was only concerned with the Jaffna Tamils, and not about those in Eastern Province, the Batticaloa Tamils. But I think he found he was getting nowhere, and realized he could make a deal with the government. Karuna went over to Colombo's side with many of his men, and helped them fight the LTTE in the East. It was his inside information on the Tigers' positions and strategies that enabled the Sri Lankan military finally to overcome them earlier this year. In 2007 he was packed off to the UK, for his own safety, with a diplomatic passport—and promptly arrested for identity fraud and jailed for nine months. But he was deported back to Sri Lanka in July 2008, and today he is the Minister for National Integration, and a member of parliament for the SLFP for the Eastern Province—a sort of Ceylonese equivalent of Abbas or Karzai. There are more such figures besides him: for example, Sivanesanathurai Chandrakanthan, who split from the Tigers at the same time as Muralitharan, is now chief minister of Eastern Province. This is what allows the Rajapakse government to claim it has not been waging war on Tamils as a whole. The Colombo elite played on the divisions, split the Tigers and won over a layer to collaborationist politics.

You touched briefly on India's involvement in the war in the late 1980s. But what was the stance of other outside powers towards the Sri Lankan government's ethnic cleansing?

As I mentioned earlier, a whole array of overseas powers helped Colombo put down the JVP uprising in 1971, so their connivance at what has happened since should hardly be surprising. It has taken various forms, and had different motivations. Many countries obligingly put the LTTE on their list of proscribed terrorist organizations—India first, in 1992, the US in 1997, Britain in 2000, and so on. Britain's links with the Sri

Lankan elite go back a long way, of course, and it has been one of the government's main arms suppliers—along with Israel, Pakistan, Russia and, since the 1990s, especially China. The US has long seen the potential strategic significance of the island, and Jayawardene had discussions with the Reagan administration over renting out Trincomalee naval base before the war. It was under Jayawardene that the country's opening to foreign capital really began: Free Trade Zones were established to lure multinational corporations, while workers' rights were drastically curtailed, the minimum wage abolished, free education and medicine stopped. Plantation Tamils had been displaced by ethnic violence, but now Sinhalese peasants too began to be thrown off the land, in favour of export-oriented agribusiness. Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie itself has changed: there is no more national bourgeoisie, but rather an internationalized bourgeoisie serving multinational corporations.

Over the past thirty years, the opportunities offered up to overseas capital have mostly been in the West and South of the country. But now, with the defeat of the LTTE, the North and East have been opened up for exploitation. The US has established a new department of USAID, which apparently plans to set up industrial zones in joint ventures with local entrepreneurs; China is planning an FTZ for manufacturing micro-chips, while India is reportedly going to take over Jaffna High Security Zone and turn it into an FTZ. Israel is also involved in farming and food production in Batticaloa and Monaragala, while Iran is investing in oil-processing installations in Colombo and Trincomalee. Japan also has a very influential role, as the main donor—it accounts for over 40 per cent of aid money in Sri Lanka.

Is this the explanation for the West's double-standards with regard to the casualties on the island?

The Tamils have simply been off the radar. The total number who have died since 1983 is around 80,000, according to UN estimates—many times more than Milošević killed in Kosovo. And yet the West simply stood by and watched. This despite the huge numbers of Tamils who fled to the West—Canada, the UK and Australia combined have half as many Tamils as today's Sri Lanka. Each wave of violence caused an exodus, to the point where Tamils are now under 10 per cent of the population, having been 25 per cent at independence.

What is the significance of the local elections held in August this year?

These were elections for the city councils of Jaffna and Vavuniya, and intended to demonstrate Rajapakse's largesse towards the Tamils after victory over the LTTE. The government won in Jaffna, but mainly because the place has been completely militarized. Another Tamil defector, Douglas Devananda, heads a paramilitary group which has been accused of threatening voters. But even so, only 20 per cent turned out in Jaffna. The majority of the remaining population in the city are hand-picked families, and the rest have been forced into silence, so you cannot say this was a victory for the government. In Vavuniya the turnout was higher, at 50 per cent, but 35 per cent voted for the Tamil National Alliance—they voted for Helam.

What is the situation for the civilian population in the North?

There are currently 300,000 Tamils living in 40 or so refugee camps; most of them are at Manik Farm near Vavuniya. These are run by the Sri Lankan military, who are essentially detaining people en masse indefinitely. They are basically concentration camps. The army says it needs to screen the refugees, to find LTTE fighters, but they already have prisons for that, and many of those in the camps are old people and children. They are being kept prisoner because they are Tamils. Little food or medicine is being provided, and conditions are very bad. It is also difficult for people in the camps to communicate with the outside world, so there is little information about what is happening in them. The government has a tight grip on the media, and has imposed blanket censorship—Sri Lankans have no idea about the casualties, the scale of destruction, conditions in the camps. They have been fed government-manufactured facts while the army waged its war against the Tamils, both Tigers and civilians. It has been described as a 'war without witness'.

How would you characterize the Rajapakse government?

It is really a cabal—two of the president's brothers are in the government. A new dynasty is being formed, amid incredible corruption and authoritarianism. All opposition or even criticism is silenced by the ruling elite. For example, Lasantha Wickramatunga, the editor of the *Sunday Leader*, who had written a series of articles on corruption in the ruling family, was assassinated in January; days earlier, he had foretold his own death

at the hands of government forces.³ Many more journalists have been detained or killed. With the war, Sri Lankan civil society has been militarized, and thanks to government control over the media, the people have been brainwashed with lies and myths; the intelligentsia has simply vanished. The country is on the path to parliamentary dictatorship, with politics reduced to a tussle between dynasties, backed by monks and militias. This is the outcome of a long evolution: the sixty years since independence have produced an ethnocentric Sinhala-Buddhist polity founded on feudal customs and falsified history, in which the ethnic majority is guaranteed its power forever.

The situation seems very bleak. What future do you see for the country?

It is bleak. Fifty years of ethnic cleansing have wiped out whole generations who knew any sort of peace, and made cohabitation with the Sinhalese people virtually impossible. The Sinhala elite has transformed the country into a counter-insurgency state like Colombia, in which repression, torture, imprisonment without trial and disappeared people are institutionally embedded. I don't think anything now can be done from above, let alone from the debased self-interests of the 'international community'. The humanitarian brigades of the West remained largely silent while innocent Tamils were being slain. Some in the West want Pakistan to become as ruthless as Sri Lanka in dealing with the 'enemy within'.

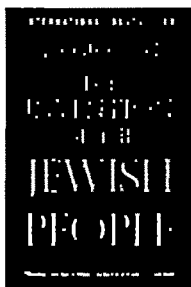
My fear is not only for the Tamils but also for the Sinhalese people, who remain the most generous people in the country. The Tamils are dour, like the Scottish Presbyterians—they come from a sparse land; but they share everything they have, they share their poverty—they have that type of camaraderie, or better that type of kinship. But it's a feudal sort of remnant, whereas the Sinhalese are much more progressive in that sense. They come from a lush part of the land—everything grows there, you can lie in bed and pluck a mango from a tree, and the next day there will be another one.

To continue with the same metaphor, I can see some small seedlings of hope. For example, there are former LTTE figures, now in exile, who are

³ His last editorial, 'And Then They Came For Me', was published three days after his death: *Sunday Leader*, 11 January 2009.

putting the stress on the political struggle. They are saying that so many have died in the war, and for what? The military strategy did not provide a solution. They are saying that Tamils need to claim their rights—they are not talking about Eelam—and make their suffering understood internationally. But the obstacles are huge: this government thinks its all-out militarized approach has been vindicated, and has now used the trappings of democracy to legitimize the outcome. It is not simply going to give the Tamils their rights. And its authoritarianism means that the next people to suffer will be the Sinhalese themselves. What is important, and I say this as someone in my eighties now, is not to give up. To carry on writing and speaking the truth and fighting every atrocity. These are the seeds that we can sow. Who knows but that one day they might bear fruit.

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ERIK OLIN WRIGHT

UNDERSTANDING CLASS

Towards an Integrated Analytical Approach

WHEN I BEGAN writing about class in the mid-1970s, I viewed Marxist and positivist social science as foundationally distinct and incommensurable warring paradigms. I argued that Marxism had distinctive epistemological premises and methodological approaches which were fundamentally opposed to those of mainstream social science. In the intervening period I have rethought the underlying logic of my approach to class analysis a number of times.¹ While I continue to work within the Marxist tradition, I no longer conceive of Marxism as a comprehensive paradigm that is inherently incompatible with 'bourgeois' sociology.²

Having previously argued for the general superiority of Marxist class analysis over its main sociological rivals—especially Weberian approaches and those adopted within mainstream stratification research—I now take the view that these different ways of analysing class can all potentially contribute to a fuller understanding by identifying different causal processes at work in shaping the micro- and macro- aspects of inequality in capitalist societies. The Marxist tradition is a valuable body of ideas because it successfully identifies real mechanisms that matter for a wide range of important problems, but this does not mean it has a monopoly on the capacity to identify such mechanisms. In practice, then, sociological research by Marxists should combine the distinctive Marxist-identified mechanisms with whatever other causal processes seem pertinent to the explanatory task at hand.³ What might be called a 'pragmatist realism' has replaced the 'grand battle of paradigms'.

For the sake of simplicity, in what follows I will focus on three clusters of causal processes relevant to class analysis, each associated with a different strand of sociological theory. The first identifies classes with the attributes and material life conditions of individuals. The second focuses on the ways in which social positions afford some people control over economic resources while excluding others—defining classes relative to processes of ‘opportunity hoarding’. The third approach conceives of classes as being structured by mechanisms of domination and exploitation, in which economic positions accord some people power over the lives and activities of others. The first is the approach taken in stratification research, the second is the Weberian perspective, and the third is associated with the Marxist tradition.

Attributes and conditions

Both among sociologists and among the lay public, class is principally conceived in terms of individual attributes and life conditions. Attributes such as sex, age, race, religion, intelligence, education, geographical location, and so on, are held to be consequential for a number of things we might want to explain, from health to voting behaviour to childrearing practices. Some of these attributes are acquired at birth, others later in life; some are stable, others quite dependent upon a person’s specific social situation, and may accordingly change over time. In the stratification approach, people can also be categorized by the material conditions in which they live: squalid apartments, pleasant suburban houses or mansions in gated communities; dire poverty, adequate income or extravagant wealth, and so on. ‘Class’, then, identifies those economically important attributes that shape people’s opportunities and choices

¹ An early statement of my views on Marxism and mainstream social science can be found in the introduction to *Class, Crisis and the State*, London 1978. The principal subsequent works in which I have discussed these issues are *Classes*, London and New York 1985; *The Debate on Classes*, London and New York 1989; *Class Counts: Comparative Studies in Class Analysis*, Cambridge 1997; and *Approaches to Class Analysis*, Cambridge 2005. A previous version of this paper was given at a conference on ‘Comprehending Class’, University of Johannesburg, June 2009.

² I prefer to use the expression ‘Marxist tradition’ rather than ‘Marxism’ precisely because the latter suggests something more like a comprehensive paradigm.

³ This stance towards the Marxist tradition does not imply simply dissolving Marxism into some amorphous ‘sociology’ or social science. Marxism remains distinctive in organizing its agenda around a set of fundamental questions or problems which other theoretical traditions either ignore or marginalize, and identifying a distinctive set of interconnected causal processes relevant to those questions.

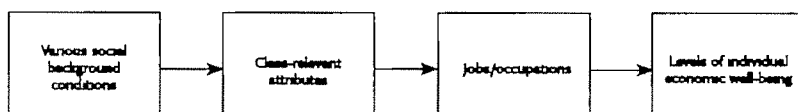
in a market economy, and thus their material conditions. Class should neither be identified simply with people's individual attributes nor with their material conditions of life; rather, it is a way of talking about the interconnections between these two.

Within this approach, the key individual attribute in economically developed societies is education, but some sociologists also include more elusive attributes such as cultural resources, social connections and even individual motivations.⁴ When these different attributes and life conditions broadly cluster together, then these clusters are called 'classes'. The 'middle class' here denotes people who have enough education and money to participate fully in some vaguely defined 'mainstream' way of life (which might include particular consumption patterns, for example). The 'upper class' designates people whose wealth, high income and social connections enable them to live their lives apart from 'ordinary' people, while the 'lower class' refers to those who lack the necessary educational and cultural resources to live securely above the poverty line. Finally, the 'underclass' are those who live in extreme poverty, marginalized from the mainstream of society by a lack of basic education and skills needed for stable employment.

In the individual-attributes approach to class, the central concern of sociologists has been to understand how people acquire the characteristics that place them in one class or another. Given that for most people in the countries where sociologists live, economic status and rewards are mainly acquired through employment in paid jobs, the central focus of research in this tradition has been the process through which people obtain the cultural, motivational and educational resources that affect their occupations in the labour market. Because the conditions of life in childhood are clearly of considerable importance in these processes, this approach devotes a great deal of attention to what is sometimes called 'class background'—the family settings in which these key attributes are acquired. In a stripped down form, the causal logic of these kinds of class processes is illustrated in Figure 1 (overleaf).

Skills, education and motivations are, of course, very important determinants of an individual's economic prospects. What is missing in this

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu was the leading contemporary sociologist systematically to include a range of cultural elements in an expanded list of class-relevant individual attributes.

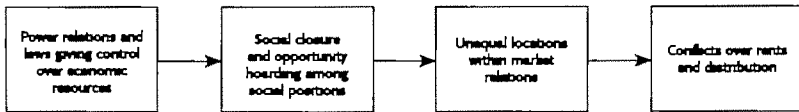
FIGURE 1: *The individual-attributes approach to class and inequality*

approach to class, however, is any serious consideration of the inequalities in the positions people occupy, or of the relational nature of those positions. Education shapes the kinds of jobs people get, but why are some jobs 'better' than others? Why do some jobs confer a great deal of power while others do not? And is there any relation between the power and wealth enjoyed by some and the lack of it experienced by others? Rather than focusing exclusively on the process through which individuals are sorted into positions, the other two approaches to class analysis begin by examining the nature of the positions themselves.

Opportunity hoarding

The second approach, in which classes are defined by access to and exclusion from certain economic opportunities, focuses on 'opportunity hoarding'—a concept closely associated with the work of Max Weber.⁵ In order for certain jobs to confer high income and special advantages, it is important for their incumbents to have various means of excluding others from access to them. This is also sometimes referred to as a process of social closure, in which access to a position becomes restricted. One way of doing this is by creating requirements that are very costly for people to fulfill. Educational credentials often have this character: high levels of schooling generate high income in part because there are significant restrictions on the supply of highly educated people. Admissions procedures, tuition costs, risk-aversion to large loans by low-income people, and so on, all tend to block access to higher education, to the benefit of those in jobs that require such qualifications. If a massive effort was made to improve the educational level of those with less education, this would itself lower the value of education for those with more of it, since

⁵ Among American sociologists, the term 'opportunity hoarding' was used most explicitly by Charles Tilly, especially in his book *Durable Inequality*, Berkeley 1999. Bourdieu's work on fields and forms of capital also revolves around processes of opportunity hoarding.

FIGURE 2: *The opportunity-hoarding approach to class and inequality*

its value depends to a significant extent on its scarcity. The opportunity hoarding mechanism is illustrated schematically in Figure 2.

Some might object to this characterization of educational credentials. Economists, for example, argue that education creates 'human capital' which renders people more productive, and this is why employers are willing to pay them higher wages. But while some of the higher earnings that accompany higher education reflect productivity differences, this is only part of the story. Equally important are the various mechanisms through which people are excluded from acquiring education, thus restricting the supply of people for these jobs. A simple thought experiment shows how this works: imagine that the United States had open borders and let anyone with a medical, engineering or computer-science degree from anywhere in the world come to the US and practise their profession. The massive increase in the supply of people with these credentials would undermine the earning capacity of holders of the credentials already living in the country, even though their actual knowledge and skills would not be diminished. Citizenship rights are a special, and potent, form of 'licence' to sell one's labour in a particular labour market.

Accreditation and licensing are particularly important mechanisms for opportunity hoarding, but many other institutional devices have been used in various times and places to protect the privileges and advantages of specific groups: colour bars excluded racial minorities from many jobs in the United States, especially (but not only) in the South until the 1960s; marriage bars and gender exclusions restricted access to certain jobs for women until well into the 20th century in most developed capitalist countries; religion, cultural criteria, manners, accent—all of these have constituted mechanisms of exclusion. Perhaps the most important exclusionary mechanism is private-property rights in the means of production. Private-property rights are the pivotal form of closure that

determines access to the 'job' of employer. If workers were to attempt to take over a factory and run it themselves, they would be challenging their exclusion from control over the means of production; the capacity of owners to acquire profits, meanwhile, depends upon their defence of this exclusion. The core class division between capitalists and workers—common to both Weberian and Marxian traditions of sociology—can therefore be understood, from a Weberian perspective, as reflecting a specific form of opportunity hoarding enforced by the legal rules of property rights.

Exclusionary mechanisms that shape class structures within the opportunity-hoarding approach do not operate only in the most privileged strata. Labour unions can also function as an exclusionary mechanism, by protecting incumbents from competition by outsiders. This does not mean that on balance unions contribute to increasing inequality, since they may also act politically to reduce inequalities and may effectively diminish those generated by other mechanisms of exclusion—especially those connected to private ownership of the means of production. Still, to the extent that unions create barriers to entry to certain jobs, they do create a form of social closure that improves the material conditions of life for insiders.

Sociologists who adopt the opportunity-hoarding approach to class generally identify three broad categories in American society: capitalists, defined by private-property rights in the ownership of means of production; the middle class, defined by mechanisms of exclusion over the acquisition of education and skills; and the working class, defined by their exclusion from both higher educational credentials and capital. That segment of the working class that is protected by unions is seen either as a privileged stratum within the working class, or sometimes as a component of the middle class.

The critical difference between opportunity-hoarding mechanisms of class and individual-attribute mechanisms is this: in the former, the economic advantages gained from being in a privileged class position are causally connected to the disadvantages of those excluded from such positions. In the individual-attributes approach, such advantages and disadvantages are simply the outcomes of individual conditions: the rich are rich because they have favourable attributes, the poor poor because they lack them; there is no systematic causal connection between these

facts. Eliminating poverty by improving the relevant attributes of the poor—their education, cultural level, human capital—would in no way harm the affluent. In the case of opportunity hoarding, the rich are rich in part because the poor are poor, and the things the rich do to maintain their wealth contribute to the disadvantages faced by poor people. Here, moves to eliminate poverty by removing the mechanisms of exclusion would potentially undermine the advantages of the affluent.

Exploitation and domination

The approach to class analysis that focuses on mechanisms of exploitation and domination is most closely associated with the Marxist tradition, although some sociologists more influenced by Weber also include these mechanisms in their conceptions of class.⁶ Most sociologists, however, ignore them; some explicitly deny their relevance. 'Domination' and, especially, 'exploitation' are contentious terms because they tend to imply a moral judgement, rather than a neutral description. Many sociologists try to avoid such terms because of this normative content. I feel, however, that they are important and accurately identify certain key issues in understanding class. 'Domination' refers to the ability to control the activities of others; 'exploitation' refers to the acquisition of economic benefits from the labour of those who are dominated. All exploitation therefore involves some kind of domination, but not all domination involves exploitation.

In relations of exploitation and domination, it is not simply the case that one group benefits by restricting access to certain kinds of resources or positions; in addition, the exploiting/dominating group is able to control the labour of another group to its own advantage. Consider the following contrasting, classic cases: in the first, large landowners seize control of common grazing lands, prevent peasants from gaining access to them, and reap economic benefits from having exclusive control of that land for their own use. In the second, the same landowners, having seized control of the grazing lands and excluded the peasants, then bring some of those peasants back onto the land as agricultural labourers. In this second case, the landowners not only gain from controlling access to the land (opportunity hoarding), they dominate the farm workers and

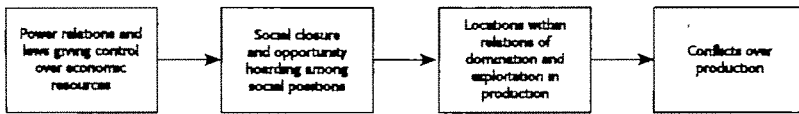
⁶ Weber, of course, develops an elaborate general discussion of domination, power and authority, but mostly in the context of his analyses of organizations and the state, not his specification of the concept of class.

exploit their labour. This is a stronger form of relational interdependency than in the case of simple exclusion, for here there is an ongoing relationship between not only the *conditions* but also the *activities* of the advantaged and disadvantaged. Exploitation and domination are forms of structured inequality which require the continual active cooperation between exploiters and exploited, dominators and dominated.

We could, then, summarize the contrast between the role of social relations in each of the three approaches to class analysis as follows. In the stratification approach, neither the economic conditions in which people live nor their activities are understood as directly reflecting social relations; it is the least relational of the three. The Weberian approach sees people's economic conditions as being formed through relations of exclusion, but does not specify class as embodying relations among activities. The Marxist tradition is relational in both senses, drawing attention to the structuring effect of exploitation and domination on both economic conditions and activities.

The Marxist approach to class is represented in Figure 3. As in the Weberian tradition, power and legal rules which enforce social closure are important in defining the basic structure of social positions—particularly private ownership of the means of production. But here the critical effect of opportunity hoarding is domination and exploitation, not simply market advantage.

Within this approach, the central class division in capitalist society is between those who own and control the means of production—capitalists—and those hired to use those means of production—workers. Capitalists, within this framework, exploit and dominate workers. Other positions within the class structure draw their specific character from their relationship to this basic division. Managers, for example, exercise many of the powers of domination, but are also subordinated to capitalists: CEOs and top managers of corporations often develop significant ownership stakes in their corporations and therefore become more like capitalists. Highly educated professionals and some categories of technical workers have sufficient control over skills and knowledge—a critical resource in contemporary economies—that they can maintain considerable autonomy from domination within work and significantly reduce, or even neutralize, the extent to which they are exploited.

FIGURE 3: *The exploitation-domination approach to class and inequality*

In Weberian and Marxist approaches alike, power plays an important role. In both, the inequalities in income and wealth connected to the class structure are sustained by the exercise of power, not simply by the actions of individuals. The inequalities generated by opportunity hoarding require power to be used in order to enforce exclusions; the inequalities connected to exploitation require supervision, monitoring of labour and sanctions to enforce discipline. In both cases, social struggles seeking to challenge these forms of power would potentially threaten the privileges of those in advantaged class positions.

Integrating three mechanisms

While sociologists have generally tended to base their research on one or another of these three approaches to class, there really is no reason to see them as mutually exclusive. One way of combining them is to see each as identifying a key process that shapes a different aspect of the class structure:

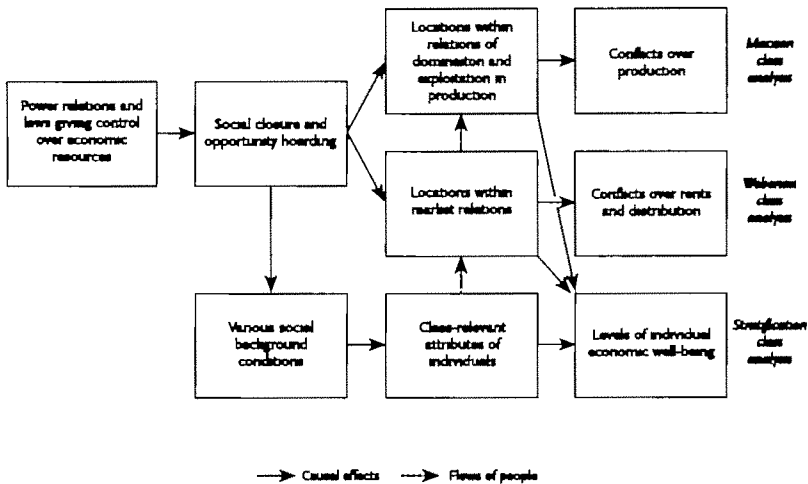
- ▶ The Marxist tradition identifies exploitation and domination within the fundamental class division in capitalist society: that between capitalists and workers.
- ▶ The Weberian approach identifies opportunity hoarding as the central mechanism that differentiates 'middle-class' jobs from the broader working class by creating barriers restricting the supply of people for desirable employment. The key issue here is not *who* is excluded, but simply the fact that there are mechanisms of exclusion that sustain the privileges of those in middle-class positions.
- ▶ The stratification approach focuses on the process through which individuals are sorted into different positions in the

class structure or marginalized altogether. Where analyses of opportunity hoarding draw attention to the exclusionary mechanisms connected to middle-class jobs, the stratification approach helps to specify the individual attributes that explain which people have access to those jobs, and who is excluded from stable working-class jobs.

These three processes operate in all capitalist societies. The differences in class structures between countries are produced by the varying interactions of these mechanisms. The theoretical task is to think through the different ways they are linked and combined; the empirical task is to develop ways of studying each mechanism and the interconnections between them.

One possible nested micro-macro model is illustrated schematically in Figure 4. In this model the power relations and legal rules that give people effective control over economic resources—means of production, finance, human capital—generate structures of social closure and opportunity hoarding connected to social positions. Opportunity hoarding then produces three streams of causal effects: firstly, it shapes the micro-level processes through which individuals acquire class-relevant attributes; secondly, it shapes the structure of locations within market relations—occupations and jobs—and the associated distributional conflicts; and thirdly, it shapes the structure of relations within production, especially relations of domination and exploitation, and the associated conflicts in that sphere. The first of these causal streams in turn directs the flow of people into class locations within the market and production. Jointly the class attributes of individuals and their class locations affect their levels of individual economic well-being.

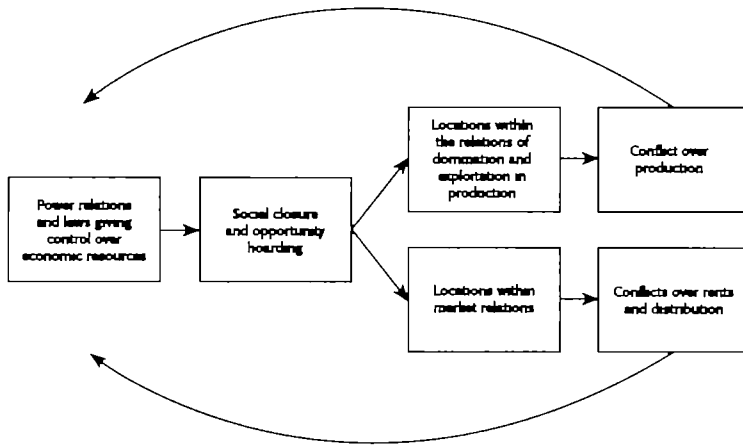
One final element in the broad synthetic model is needed. Figure 4 treats power relations and institutional rules as exogenous structures, whereas in fact they are themselves shaped by class processes and class conflicts. This matters because structures of inequality are dynamic systems, and the fate of individuals depends not just on the micro-level processes they encounter in their lives, or on the social structures within which those lives take place, but on the trajectory of the system as a whole. Treating the underlying power relations that support a given structure of class locations as fixed parameters is deeply misleading and contributes to the

FIGURE 4: *Combined class analysis: macro and micro processes*

incorrect view that the fate of individuals is simply a function of their attributes and individual circumstances. What we need, therefore, is a recursive, dynamic macro-model in which social struggles contribute to changes in the trajectory of the relations themselves, as pictured in a highly simplified form in Figure 5 (overleaf). A fully elaborated class analysis, then, combines this kind of macro-model of conflict and transformation with the macro-micro, multi-level model of class processes and individual lives. In such a model the key insights of stratification, Weberian and Marxist approaches can be combined.

Class in America

Socio-economic systems differ in the degree to which they constrain the rights and powers accompanying private ownership of the means of production, and thus in the nature of the class division between capitalists and workers. The US has long possessed among the weakest public regulations of capitalist property. This is reflected in a number of crucial characteristics: its very low minimum wage, allowing for higher rates of exploitation than would otherwise be possible; low rates of taxation on high incomes, which enable the wealthiest segments of the capitalist class to live in extraordinarily extravagant ways;

FIGURE 5: *The dynamic macro-model*

weak unions and other forms of worker organization that could act as a counterweight to domination within production. The result is that, among developed capitalist countries the United States probably has the most polarized class division, viewed along the axis of exploitation and domination.

Turning to the middle class and its formation through mechanisms of opportunity hoarding—especially those linked to education—the US has historically had one of the largest middle classes among advanced capitalist states. It was the first country massively to expand higher education, and for a long time access to such qualifications was very open and relatively inexpensive, allowing people with few resources to attend universities. The US also possesses a multi-tiered higher-education system—with community colleges, junior colleges, liberal arts colleges, universities, public and private institutions—that made it possible for people to enter higher education later in life, acquire credentials and gain middle-class employment. This large and diverse system helped support the creation of a large number of middle-class jobs. It was complemented, in the decades after the Second World War, by a relatively strong labour movement that was able to mute competition for those jobs in the core of the American economy that did not require higher education. This enabled unionized workers in

such positions to acquire income and security similar to those of the credentialed middle class.

However, it was never the case—contrary to popular rhetoric—that the United States was overwhelmingly a ‘middle-class society’. Most jobs in the American employment structure did not confer advantages on the basis of exclusionary credentials, and the labour movement never organized more than about 35 per cent of the non-managerial workforce. Furthermore, in recent decades there has been an erosion of at least some processes of middle-class exclusion: the labour movement has precipitously declined since the 1970s, many kinds of middle-class jobs have become less secure and less protected by the credentials usually associated with them, and the current economic crisis has intensified the sense of precariousness among many who still think of themselves as working in middle-class jobs. Thus, while it is still certainly the case that higher education and, increasingly, advanced academic degrees play a central role in providing access to many of the best jobs in the American economy, it is much less clear what the future prospects are for a large and stable middle class.⁷

Finally, the American class structure has been marked by the particularly brutal process through which the attributes relevant to the fate of individuals are formed. The US educational system is organized in such a way that the quality of education available to children in poor families is generally vastly inferior to that on offer to children from middle-class and wealthy families. This deficit in publicly provided education for the poor is intensified by the deprivations caused by the absence of an adequate safety net and support services for poor families. The rapid de-industrialization of the American economy and the absence of comprehensive job-training programmes for those thrown out of work by the shuttering of factories means that a significant number of people find themselves without the kinds of skills needed for the current labour market. The result is that the American class structure is marked by the highest rates of poverty and economic marginality of any comparable country.

⁷ For a discussion of the patterns of job polarization in recent decades, see Wright and Rachel Dwyer, ‘The pattern of job expansion in the USA: a comparison of the 1960s and 1990s’, *Socio-economic Review*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2003, pp. 289–325.

Taking all of these processes together yields the following general picture of the American class structure at the beginning of the 21st century:

- ▶ At the top, an extremely rich capitalist class and corporate managerial class, living at extraordinarily high consumption standards, with relatively weak constraints on their exercise of economic power.
- ▶ A historically large and relatively stable middle class, anchored in an expansive and flexible system of higher education and technical training connected to jobs requiring credentials of various sorts, but whose security and future prosperity is now uncertain.
- ▶ A working class which once was characterized by a relatively large unionized segment with a standard of living and security similar to that of the middle class, but which now largely lacks these protections.
- ▶ A poor and precarious segment of the working class, characterized by low wages and relatively insecure employment, subjected to unconstrained job competition in the labour market, and with minimal protection from the state.
- ▶ A marginalized, impoverished part of the population, without the skills and education needed for jobs that would enable them to live above the poverty line, and living in conditions which make it extremely difficult to acquire those skills.
- ▶ A pattern of interaction between race and class in which the working poor and the marginalized population are disproportionately made up of racial minorities.

Towards synthesis

Adopting the integrated framework of class analysis proposed here poses different kinds of challenges for scholars working in the Marxist tradition and those adopting the stratification or Weberian approaches. For many Marxists, the main challenge is to recognize that what is most powerful within Marxist social science is its theory of a specific array of causal

mechanisms, rather than its aspiration to be a comprehensive paradigm. In the past, the relevance of these mechanisms has been defended by a rhetoric stressing the incommensurability of Marxism with other theories, and arguing that Marxist epistemology and methodology sharply differentiates it from its rivals. Such arguments are unconvincing. Marxism is a powerful tradition in social science because it provides far-reaching explanations for a range of important phenomena, not because it has some special method that sets it apart from all other theoretical currents. Of course, it is always possible that future efforts to formulate Marxism as a distinctive, comprehensive paradigm may succeed. But for the present, it seems more helpful to see Marxism as a research programme defined by attention to a specific set of problems, mechanisms and provisional explanatory theories.

The challenge of an integrated class analysis may be even greater for sociologists working in the stratification tradition. Marxist analysts of class, after all, have always in practice included discussions of the individual attributes and material life conditions of people located within an economic structure, and opportunity hoarding is an integral part of the concept of social relations of production. Stratification theorists, on the other hand, have totally ignored the problem of exploitation, at most talking about 'disadvantage', and even domination is absent from their approach. To recognize exploitation and domination as central axes of class analysis is to recognize the importance of a structure of social positions distinct from the persons who fill those positions, and this too is largely alien to stratification research.

In a sense, it is Weberians who may have the easiest task. On the one hand, most Weberian sociologists have not aspired to create a comprehensive paradigm, and have been satisfied with a theoretical tradition that provided a rich menu of loosely connected concepts addressing specific empirical and historical problems. This has been one of the principal attractions of Weberian sociology: it is basically permissive about the incorporation of almost any concept from other currents of social theory. On the other hand, Weberians have always emphasized the importance of power within social structures, and have no difficulty in distinguishing between persons and structured positions. While exploitation has not figured centrally within Weberian class analysis, the logic of Weberian categories presents no fundamental barrier to its inclusion.

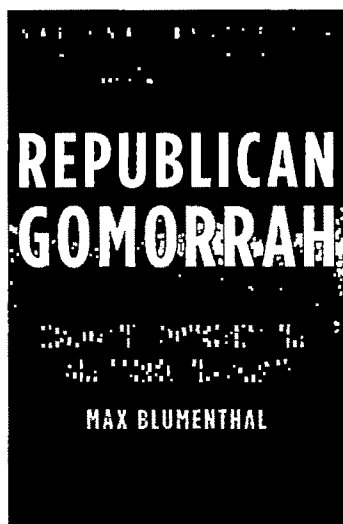
It might seem from this assessment that, in the end, we should all simply declare ourselves Weberians. This was one of the accusations levelled against my work and that of other Marxists thirty years ago by the British sociologist Frank Parkin when he wrote: 'inside every neo-Marxist there seems to be a Weberian struggling to get out'.⁸ I do not think this follows from the kind of pragmatist realism I am advocating here. Marxism remains a distinctive tradition in social science because of the specific set of problems it addresses, its normative foundations, and the distinctive inventory of concepts and mechanisms it has developed.

⁸ Frank Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique*, New York 1979, p. 25.



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GIOVANNI ARRIGHI

Of the minds produced by the international left in the second half of the twentieth century, few have been the equal, in historical imagination, architectonic scope and conceptual clarity, to Giovanni Arrighi, whose work will be read and reflected on for the rest of this century. We publish below a tribute to him from a pupil, Tom Reifer, which gives a measure of his achievement. A thinker of exceptional warmth, integrity and largeness of spirit, Arrighi drew on personal experience of struggles in both the Third and First Worlds—the movements for national liberation in Africa, and the great labour insurgencies of Italy—in the sixties, and subsequent deep engagement with the trajectory of the two leading powers of the present global order, America and China. His texts in NLR are so many landmarks in the history of the journal. Scanning one decade after another came ‘The Political Economy of Rhodesia’ in the mid sixties (NLR 1/39); ‘Towards a Theory of Capitalist Crisis’ in the seventies (NLR 1/111); the arresting paradoxes of ‘Marxist Century, American Century’ at the close of the eighties (NLR 1/179); his famous analysis of ‘World Income Inequalities and the Future of Socialism’ in the nineties (NLR 1/189); and his return to the fate of Africa in this decade (‘The African Crisis’, NLR 15), when ‘Political Economy of Global Turbulence’ (NLR 20) and ‘Hegemony Unravelling’ (NLR 32 and 33) became central parts of his last book, Adam Smith in Beijing. Personal friendship and political loyalty were unshakeable values for him. The journal knew both. In the autumn of last year, he learnt that, in all probability, he was mortally ill. He faced that prospect with an unsurpassed calm, energy and courage. In the final months of his life, he composed a striking Afterword to the new edition of The Long Twentieth Century, out in early 2010, and offered a panoramic view of his ideas, and his life, in the magisterial interview we published in the January–February issue of this year. Conducted by David Harvey, it was made possible with the help of his companion Beverly Silver, co-author of Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System, the second volume of his trilogy on the origin of our times, and can be read as his testament. Moving and challenging, it makes clear why he is mourned by friends, colleagues, pupils and admirers from all over the world—East Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe and North America. Future generations will look back on him as one of the finest lights of the period through which he lived.

TOM REIFER

CAPITAL'S CARTOGRAPHER

Giovanni Arrighi: 1937–2009

ONE OF THE more telling features of the present conjuncture is the scarcity of analyses able squarely to place today's global turbulence in geohistorical perspective.¹ In his sustained examinations of the *longue durée* of capitalism, from its late medieval and early modern origins right up to the present, arguably no intellectual has developed a more formidable analysis of the current crisis than Giovanni Arrighi. Along with Immanuel Wallerstein and the late Terence Hopkins, Arrighi was one of the originators and foremost proponents of the world-systems analysis of European domination, global capitalism, world income inequalities and 'development'.² The world-systems perspective itself—challenging the dominance of post-war modernization theory—came out of the movements of the 1960s and brought together a fruitful synthesis of Marxism, Third World radicalism and critical currents in social science, from the work of the French *Annales* geohistorians to that of the German historical school.³ Wallerstein and Hopkins, sympathetic to the students who took over Columbia University in 1968 (both served on the ad hoc faculty committee), later migrated in the 1970s to Binghamton University in New York, which became for a time the centre of world-systems studies. Arrighi joined the faculty in the late 1970s and played an instrumental role in both the graduate programme and the related Fernand Braudel Center, as well as running various collective research groups.

The range and scope of Arrighi's work—from his analysis of settler capitalism in Southern Africa to *Adam Smith in Beijing*, which traces the rise of Chinese-led East Asia as the new workshop of the world—is an astonishing achievement. Moreover, this analysis was accompanied

by a generosity of spirit towards his intellectual interlocutors that had few equals: Giovanni thrived on spirited discussion and debate, within a framework of mutual solidarity. An inspiration to many, it was thus with great sadness that the news of his passing on June 18, 2009, after a year-long battle with cancer, was received by scholars, activists, friends, former students and associates around the world.

Formation of a worldview

Born in Milan in 1937, Giovanni's political trajectory was decisively shaped by the anti-fascist attitudes of his family, in a period that included the Nazi occupation of northern Italy, the emergence of the partisan resistance and the arrival of the Allies. Originally trained in neo-classical economics in Italy and then employed in a series of different business enterprises, he set out for what was then Rhodesia in the early 1960s. As William Martin noted in an essay underscoring the importance of scholars from C. L. R. James to W. E. B. Du Bois in adumbrating the perspective, 'world-systems analysis, like the capitalist world-economy, has deep African roots'.⁴ Arrighi's migration to Africa was, in his own words, 'a true intellectual rebirth'; it was where he began his 'long march from neo-classical economics to comparative-historical sociology'.⁵ Here, along with John Saul, Martin Legassick and others, he developed a pioneering politico-economic analysis focusing on the contradictions engendered by the proletarianization and dispossession of the Southern African peasantry.

Rhodesia was also where Giovanni also met his student—subsequently a friend and colleague—Bhasker Vashee, an African of Indian descent who later became a long-time director of the Transnational Institute. Indeed,

¹ I would like to thank all the participants in the international conference on Giovanni Arrighi's work and the current crisis held on 25–29 May 2009 at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, for the stimulating debate and discussion, which has very much influenced my own thinking. I alone, of course, am responsible for any errors.

² See Giovanni Arrighi, Terence Hopkins and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Antisystemic Movements*, New York 1989.

³ See Walter Goldfrank, 'Paradigm Regained? The Rules of Wallerstein's World-System Method', *Journal of World-Systems Research*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2000.

⁴ William Martin, 'Africa and World-Systems Analysis', in John Edward Philips, ed., *Writing African History*, Rochester, NY 2005, p. 381.

⁵ Arrighi, 'The Winding Paths of Capital', NLR 56, March–April 2009.

Giovanni and Bhasker were cellmates, jailed for their anti-colonial activities; the former was deported about a week after his arrest, the latter only freed from solitary confinement after a year-long campaign to secure his release. By 1966 Giovanni had moved to Dar es Salaam, at a time when Tanzania was hosting national liberation movements from all over Africa. Here, Arrighi's colleagues included a wide range of radical scholar activists, including Walter Rodney, Saul and Wallerstein.

Giovanni subsequently returned to Italy to teach and was involved in *autonomista* movements, helping to found Gruppo Gramsci. By the late 1970s he had turned his sights towards the analysis of imperialism, completing *The Geometry of Imperialism* in 1978; it was republished with a new postscript in 1983. It was around this time that Giovanni began to reconceptualize this work as a bridge towards what would become arguably his most significant book, *The Long Twentieth Century* (1994)—widely considered the most important contemporary work devoted to the *longue durée* of world capitalism. Here, drawing on the work of Smith, Marx, Gramsci, Polanyi and Braudel—including the latter's notion of capitalism as the anti-market—Arrighi argues that capitalism evolved over a series of 'long' centuries, within which recurrent combinations of governmental and business organizations have led successive systemic cycles of accumulation. These cycles are characterized by material expansions of the capitalist world-system; when these reach their limits, capital moves into the realm of high finance, where interstate competition for mobile capital provides some of the greatest opportunities for financial expansions.

The obverse side of such expansions has been the reciprocal stimulus of military industrialization and *haute finance* in the restructuring of the world-system that accompanies the 'autumns' of cycles and the hegemonic structures of which they are a part. Financial expansions initially lead to a temporary efflorescence of the declining hegemonic power. Eventually, however, they give way simultaneously to increasing systemic chaos and to organizational revolutions in a newly emerging hegemonic bloc of business and governmental institutions. These are 'endowed with ever-more extensive and complex organizational capabilities to control the social and political environment of capital accumulation on a global scale'; a process which, as Arrighi noted, has clear 'built-in limits'.⁶

⁶ Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times*, London and New York 1994, pp. 14, 18; an updated edition is forthcoming.

Of particular significance here is the fact that, unlike Wallerstein but like Braudel, Arrighi located the origins of world capitalism not in the territorial states of Europe during the long sixteenth century, but in the Italian city-states of the thirteenth and fourteenth, in what was a regional forerunner of the modern world-system. He then traced the alliance of Genoese capital and Spanish power that produced the great voyages of discovery, before going on to analyse the changing fortunes of Dutch, British and US hegemonies, their respective systemic cycles of accumulation and, finally, the challenges posed to US power by the East Asian economic renaissance, today joined by China. In a series of subsequent works that completed what Arrighi called an unplanned trilogy—*Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System*, co-written with Beverly Silver, and *Adam Smith in Beijing*, as well as in a series of articles and an updated version of *Long Twentieth Century*, Arrighi carried this powerful analysis forward to the present.⁷

Historical forecasts

Arrighi's unique perspective on large-scale, long-term social change, in part the product of nearly a decade of collective research, seems eerily prescient in light of recent events. Take, for example, his and Silver's now decade-old proposition:

The global financial expansion of the last twenty years or so is neither a new stage of world capitalism nor the harbinger of a 'coming hegemony of global markets'. Rather, it is the clearest sign that we are in the midst of a hegemonic crisis. As such, the expansion can be expected to be a temporary phenomenon that will end more or less catastrophically.

The resultant backlash

announces that the massive redistribution of income and wealth on which the expansion rests has reached, or is about to reach, its limits . . . Once the redistribution can no longer be sustained economically, socially, and politically, the financial expansion is bound to end. The only question that remains open . . . is not whether, but how soon and how catastrophically the present global dominance of unregulated financial markets will collapse.

Arrighi and Silver concluded that the West's fall from the 'commanding heights of the world capitalist system' was 'possible, even likely'; the

⁷ Arrighi and Beverly Silver, *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System*, Minneapolis 1999; Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing*, London and New York 2007.

question then being what the character of this phase of decline would be. They asserted that:

the United States has even greater capabilities than Britain did a century ago to convert its declining hegemony into an exploitative dominion. If the system eventually breaks down, it will be primarily because of US resistance to adjustment and accommodation. And conversely, US adjustment and accommodation to the rising economic power of the East Asian region is an essential condition for a non-catastrophic transition to a new world order.⁸

In *Adam Smith in Beijing*, Arrighi returned to many of these issues in light of the re-emergence of a Chinese-centred East Asia and America's reckless gamble to continue its hegemonic reign with the invasion and occupation of Iraq. Rather than heralding a new age of US hegemony, as its advocates hoped, Arrighi emphasized how the ambitions of the Project for the New American Century, whose members staffed key positions in the Bush White House, ironically increased the long-term likelihood that the 21st century will be the age of Asia.

Adam Smith in Beijing, like its predecessors, is a difficult and ambitious book; not because it is poorly written—Giovanni's prose was exemplary in its lucidity—but because of the density of its analysis and the scope of its ambitions. As Arrighi noted, the book's purpose 'is as much to offer an interpretation of the ongoing shift of the epicentre of the global political economy from North America to East Asia in light of Adam Smith's theory of economic development, as it is to offer an interpretation of *The Wealth of Nations* in light of that shift'.⁹ At the same time, the book tackles a number of other issues, notably the reasons for what Kenneth Pomeranz has called the 'Great Divergence' between Western Europe, its settler offshoots and East Asia.¹⁰ In the latter part of the book Arrighi traces the growing bifurcation between US global military power and East Asia's increasing economic clout, evidenced in the accumulation of colossal surpluses in Chinese-led East Asia and their investment in US Treasury securities and other dollar-denominated assets, including subprime mortgages. These developments are seen as anomalies which have no real precedent in previous systemic accumulation cycles.

⁸ Arrighi and Silver, *Chaos and Governance*, pp. 273–4, 287–8.

⁹ Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing*, p. xi.

¹⁰ Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe and the Making of the Modern World Economy*, Princeton 2000.

Arrighi also drew on a series of earlier essays published in *New Left Review* to put forward an appreciation and critique—in comparative world-historical perspective—of Robert Brenner's analysis of the present long downturn.²¹ In many ways this was indicative of Arrighi's method: he always instructed his students and colleagues to attack an argument on its strong points rather than its weak ones, challenging them to come up with better explanations than those they criticized.

Brenner's critique of what he termed 'Neo-Smithian Marxism' and associated views on the origins of capitalist development, of course, contrasted sharply with the world-system perspective.²² In many ways, in terms of their analyses of capitalism's origins, Arrighi and Brenner could not be further apart. Brenner's argument against the world-system perspective largely focused on the centrality of property relations and the class struggle in agriculture, to the exclusion of virtually everything else, locating the origins of capitalist development in the English countryside as opposed to placing them in the context of an emerging world-system. Yet on the question of capitalist agriculture, Wallerstein and Brenner, following in the tradition of the *Annales* focus on rural history—and despite their great differences—have more in common with each other than with Arrighi in *Long Twentieth Century*, where agriculture plays little or no role in the origins of capitalist development on a world scale.²³ In dramatic contrast, Braudel, following Oliver Cox's *Foundations of Capitalism* (1959), located capitalism at the top level of world-trade and high finance, and to a lesser extent industry—the position to which Arrighi largely adhered.

With regard to the current crisis, however, Arrighi and Brenner have much more in common. Brenner's explanation of the long downturn seems to match Arrighi's account of the end of material expansions: for both, increasing competition brings down the rate of profit. Both consider the present global downturn not merely as a financial crisis but as the expression of a much deeper crisis of capitalism—exacerbated

²¹ See Brenner, 'The Economics of Global Turbulence', *NLR* 1/229, May–June 1998; and *The Boom and the Bubble: The US in the World-Economy*, London and New York 2002, pp. 609–22.

²² Brenner, 'The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism', *NLR* 1/104, July–August 1977.

²³ See also Brenner and Christopher Isett, 'England's Divergence from China's Yangzi Delta: Property Relations, Microeconomics and Patterns of Development,' *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 61, no. 2, May 2002.

by government action—dating from the long downturn of the 1970s. Brenner, however, largely characterizes this as a crisis of over-production, whereas Arrighi saw it as primarily a crisis of over-accumulation. Another aspect of Arrighi's emphasis, in contrast to Brenner, was to see the current long downturn and its accompanying financial expansion as related to the ongoing crisis of US hegemony, akin to British troubles in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including to some degree the power of labour.¹⁴

Another difference is Brenner's almost exclusive focus both on manufacturing and on Japan, Germany and the US, in contrast to Arrighi's greater emphasis on finance and the financialization of capital—notably the development of offshore money markets—hegemony and global geopolitics. A decisive turning point here for Arrighi, connecting both these realms, was the US-led financial expansion of the late 1970s and early 1980s, in which the US competed for mobile capital on the global capital markets by borrowing via the most regressive means possible. This was a crucial shift, as Washington abandoned its earlier tolerance for forms of developmentalism in favour of a macroeconomic counter-revolution associated with the so-called Washington Consensus. Among the best analysts of these processes—notably the drive by the Wall Street–Treasury nexus to open up Pacific-rim markets that led to the Asian economic crisis of 1997, and subsequent attempts at increased regional financial integration—was Peter Gowan, in his *The Global Gamble* (1999) and a series of related articles.¹⁵

Power and territory

Among the central aspects of Arrighi's periodization of global capitalism is its fundamental convergence with Braudel's and Schumpeter's emphases on capitalism's flexibility, non-specialization and capacity

¹⁴ See also the important article by Silver and Arrighi, 'Workers North and South', *Socialist Register*, 2001, and Arrighi, 'Marxist Century, American Century: The Making and Remaking of the World Labour Movement', *NLR* 1/79, January–February 1990.

¹⁵ Gowan also passed away in June: see the obituary by Tariq Ali in *NLR* 59. For Gowan's most sustained engagement with the world-systems perspective, see his important review of Arrighi's and Silver's *Chaos and Governance* in *NLR* 13, January–February 2002, and his 'Contemporary Intracore Relations and World-Systems Theory', in Christopher Chase-Dunn and Salvatore Babones, eds, *Global Social Change: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, Baltimore 2006.

for change and adaptation. Here too, money capital and the system of national debts play a privileged role in restarting capitalism as it accumulates in declining centres and seeks to lay claim to future incomes by investing in rising hegemons, from Venice to the US.¹⁶ Equally important is Arrighi's steadfast emphasis on geohistory, through which he demonstrates how recurrent combinations of geography and history have made and unmade capitalist fortunes. A further vital dimension of his analysis—often neglected, though it is central to understanding his deployment of Gramsci's concept of hegemony in the context of capitalism as a global system—is the crucial importance of recurrent battles between capitalist and territorialist powers. These struggles might also be seen as synonymous with those between, on the one hand, maritime and later air powers (Venice, the United Provinces, England, the US), and on the other, territorialist Continental powers (successively Spain, France, Germany and the former Soviet Union).

As Arrighi emphasized, the financial expansions, intensified competition for mobile capital and growing systemic chaos that characterize hegemonic transitions generally result in the remaking of the global system on new and enlarged social foundations under a rising hegemonic power, or at least bring the collapse of the Continental challenger. The most recent episode produced the dramatic fall of the Soviet bloc, with much of the region returning to its original Third World role, in a battle won in the global capital markets as much as on any battlefield, as Arrighi many times underscored. This schema reveals not only capitalism's flexibility, but also the evolution of this expanding system as it grew to global scope.

Another critical aspect of Arrighi's work was his analysis of geo-economic regions and global income inequalities. Here he always aimed to take into account, first, the pre-colonial heritage; second, the impact of colonialism; and third, post-colonial developments—all within the framework of comparative world-historical analysis. The thrust of Arrighi's most recent work in this area was to combine his long-term comparative analysis of sub-Saharan Africa with his later work on East

¹⁶ Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*, pp. 4–5; and 'Winding Paths of Capital', pp. 90–4. For an important article on the often neglected centrality of money and banking in the origins and development of capitalism, see Geoffrey Ingham, 'Capitalism, Money and Banking: A Critique of Recent Historical Sociology', *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 50, no. 1, March 1999, pp. 76–96.

Asia, as well as to chart developments in other regions, including what he called the organic core.⁷

Accumulation and dispossession

The present day crisis of capitalism would seem an especially fortuitous time to revisit discussions on the nature of capitalist development, its future trajectories and realistic world-historic alternatives. In an article aimed at 'rethinking the non-debates of the 1970s', Arrighi noted that, although such dialogues of the deaf may have helped to protect emerging research agendas against their premature demise, 'eventually they become counterproductive for the full realization of their potentialities. I feel that world-systems analysis has long reached this stage and that it can only benefit from a vigorous discussion of issues that should have been debated long ago but never were'.⁸ Thus, he took up many of the most powerful critiques of Wallerstein's world-systems perspective, including those developed by Theda Skocpol, Braudel and Brenner.

Perhaps equally significant in this context was Arrighi's return to his own earlier work on the role of labour supplies. The contradictions of capital accumulation by dispossession via full proletarianization were most clearly revealed in what Samir Amin called the 'Africa of the labour reserves', encompassing much of Southern Africa, including the land of apartheid.⁹ Here, the combination of white settler colonialism, agriculture, mineral wealth and labour shortages led to the full dispossession of much of the African peasantry, so as to provide low-cost migrant labour for the mines and manufacturing industry; but over time this ended up raising labour costs. In marked contrast—as shown by Gillian Hart, on whose work Arrighi drew—was the accumulation without dispossession and associated 'rural development and industrialization' that took place throughout much of East Asia. The paradox here—underscored by both Hart and Arrighi and his co-authors—is that the full proletarianization of the original producers through accumulation with dispossession, although classically associated with the origins of capitalist development,

⁷ Arrighi, 'Marxist Century, American Century'; 'World Income Inequalities and the Future of Socialism', *NLR* 1/189, September–October 1991; 'The African Crisis: World Systemic and Regional Aspects', *NLR* 15, May–June 2002.

⁸ Arrighi, 'Capitalism and the Modern World-System: Rethinking the Non-Debates of the 1970s', *Review*, vol. XXI, no. 1, 1998.

⁹ Samir Amin, *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism*, New York 1976.

has become one of the biggest barriers to successful capitalist development in Southern Africa and perhaps many other regions of the global South.²⁰ Differing trajectories of accumulation, with or without dispossession, and associated policies of racial exclusion thus underpin the radical divergence in development experiences in East Asia and Southern Africa. Arrighi and his co-authors also suggest specific policy changes in Southern Africa, including distribution of land to the landless and increases in education and social welfare, that would benefit the vast majority of Africans.²¹

Though it has not been done to date, one can imagine teasing out a series of geohistorical linkages between Marx's, Wallerstein's, Braudel's and Arrighi's work on the 'top level of world-trade' with the work of Barrington Moore, Brenner and others on agricultural capitalism, relating these developments in an original synthesis. The idea here would be to demonstrate more fully—including through building on Wallerstein's classic treatment of these issues in *The Modern World-System* and through a re-reading of both the 'Brenner debate' and the 'non-debates' of the 1970s—how capitalist agriculture, urbanization and what Arrighi calls a 'capitalist system of statemaking and warmaking' are all intimately entwined in the world-historical origins of capitalist development.²² It would be of particular interest to see whether Hart's

²⁰ See Arrighi, Nicole Aschoff and Benjamin Scully, 'Accumulation by Dispossession and its Limits: The Southern African Paradigm Revisited', 17 February 2009, unpublished paper, especially p. 39. The authors also cite Gillian Hart's *Disabling Globalization: Places of Power in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, Berkeley 2002, in which Hart argues that these development trajectories suggest that we should 'revisit classical political economy debates, and revise the teleological assumption about "primitive accumulation" through which dispossession is seen as a natural concomitant of capitalist development': pp. 199–200.

²¹ It would be interesting to extend this comparative analysis to Latin America. For an example, contrasting the development models and industrialization of Japan-led East Asia and US-led Latin America, see the work of the late Fernando Fajnzylber, *Unavoidable Industrial Restructuring in Latin America*, Durham, NC 1990.

²² Something like this was intimated by Perry Anderson in an essay on Brenner, in which he observed that 'The idea of capitalism in one country, taken literally, is only a bit more plausible than that of socialism . . . Historically, it makes better sense to view the emergence of capitalism like this: as a value-added process gaining in complexity as it moved along a chain of interrelated sites. In this story, the role of cities was always central. English landowners could have never started their conversion to commercial agriculture without the market for wool in Flemish towns.' See Anderson, *Spectrum*, London and New York 2007, p. 251.

and Arrighi's work on accumulation with and without dispossession in contemporary Southern Africa and East Asia might shed light on the origins of capitalist development trajectories in agriculture as analysed by Brenner and Wallerstein.

These debates about past and present are of course intertwined; excursions into the past quintessentially reflecting contemporary concerns. For, as the editorial introduction to Brenner's critique of 'Neo-Smithian Marxism' noted in the late 1970s,

The implications of conflicting accounts of how capitalism emerged, and why it did so in some regions of the world rather than others, were clearly of far more than purely historical interest. They affect assessments of the coordinates of class struggle on a global scale today, interpretations of the bourgeois state and conceptions of the transition from capitalism to socialism. The debate further involved a series of key theoretical problems concerning the nature of historical determination, the relation of economics to politics and the validity of Marx's basic analysis of capitalism.²³

Much the same could be said for present day debates on these matters, to which we should arguably return, in light of new developments and research findings.

Arrighi had also hoped in recent years to put together a compilation of his most important work on the foundations of global inequality. Sadly, he will now be unable to complete this work, though one hopes that others will make these writings available to the wider audience they deserve. One can only wonder to what extent he might have drawn in this endeavour on the important work done on inequalities over the last few decades by the likes of Jean Drèze, Amartya Sen, Amiya Kumar Bagchi, Charles Tilly, Branko Milanovic, and Roberto Korzeniewicz and Timothy Patrick Moran. There could be no better tribute to the memory of Giovanni Arrighi and his quest for a more humane global system than for scholars and activists to return to these central questions of our time, as an integral part of ongoing collective efforts to understand the world and transform it in more peaceful, socially just and egalitarian directions. Among the most significant losses in the maelstrom of 21st-century life has been the virtual disappearance of attempts to analyse

²³ 'Themes', *NLR* 1/104, July–August 1977, p. 1.

the present in the *longue durée*. Giovanni Arrighi's work—and that of his collaborators—represents a pioneering effort to do exactly this. We can only hope that future generations will have the wisdom to build on his thinking, most especially the spirit of solidarity and scholarly acuity which informed all his work.

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REVIEWS

Michel Aglietta and Laurent Berrebi, *Désordres dans le capitalisme mondial*

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JOHN GRAHL

MEASURING WORLD DISORDERS

Since the outbreak of the subprime crisis in 2007, and especially after its brutal aggravation the following year, there has been an immense flood of economic commentary. Even those who have spent the last decades celebrating financial deregulation have found it easy to be wise after the event. But while post-facto diagnoses have been plentiful, sustained analyses that anticipated the crisis were less common. *Désordres dans le capitalisme mondial* belongs firmly in this latter category, offering a comprehensive survey of the global economy and identifying the increasing tensions that have arisen within it in recent years. These are the product of the completely inconsistent paths adopted by the main economic powers—the US, Japan, the Eurozone, China—and, according to the book's authors, can only be addressed by greater coordination among the four. However, they also argue that the world economy in the twenty-first century is likely to be shaped increasingly by today's emerging countries, holding out the possibility of a more multi-lateral global order to succeed the present system of imbalances.

Michel Aglietta, currently based at the University of Paris-X, is best known in the Anglophone world for his *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, a seminal text of the French *Régulation* school, first published in 1976 (a new edition appeared in 2001). At the time, mainstream economic discussion was dominated by extremely abstract general equilibrium theories which were taken, in a very naïve way, as a guide to policy decisions. Aglietta, by contrast, insisted—as he has done throughout his subsequent work—on

the political structures and social institutions which make market exchange possible and establish its limits in specific historical contexts. A *Theory of Capitalist Regulation* combined analysis of the key economic institutions and control mechanisms of the postwar period—putting forward the concepts of ‘accumulation regime’ and ‘mode of regulation’—with an account of their cumulative loss of effectiveness and of the crisis tendencies thereby released. The book was generally better received by Europeans than Americans, who were more aware of some of the simplifications and abstractions in Aglietta’s picture of the US economy. But many heterodox economists welcomed it as pointing towards a systematic account of the dynamics of contemporary capitalist systems. Among neo-Marxist economists, previously influenced by Althusserian structuralism, Regulation Theory was widely perceived as a significant renewal of their own analytical traditions—though Aglietta’s insistence that ‘institutions lead economic trends’, rather than the economy playing the determining role, also indicated a distance from classical structuralist positions.

In the decades since, he has produced an immense range of economic and socio-economic studies, centred on monetary and financial questions, but also embracing social anthropology, economic sociology and economic history. Few of these writings have been translated from French—a regrettable Anglophone provincialism that means his work is not as well known to English-language readers as it should be. For no other economist today is producing such a rich and varied body of work. To take three examples from among the works he has published since the turn of the century, *Dérives du capitalisme financier* (with Antoine Rebérioux, 2004; translated as *Corporate Governance Adrift*) provides a critique of the doctrine of shareholder value and gives an account of the high-tech bubble and related corporate scandals; *La Chine vers la superpuissance* (co-written by Yves Landry, 2007) analyses the PRC’s astonishing growth while stressing its political and social specificity, denying the notion of any simple convergence with Western norms; and in *La Monnaie entre violence et confiance* (2002), Aglietta and André Orléan revisit their audacious 1982 account of the origins and nature of money, and the theory of monetary crises that they developed from it.

That earlier work, *La Violence de la monnaie*, made what many thought to be extravagant use of René Girard’s speculative Christian anthropology, and may help to account for a certain distance that has arisen between Aglietta and other members of the *Régulation* school. But it is also apparent that *régulationnisme* has become less clearly defined over time, the sense of a unified approach fragmenting as its proponents’ interests have varied. Thus while Aglietta has continued to focus on the overall dynamics of capitalist development (as these find concentrated expression in the financial sphere), the other leading exponent of the school, Robert Boyer, has tended rather to

emphasize comparative international studies. The third highly influential figure, Alain Lipietz, moved away from the School's preoccupations, becoming a Green MHP in 1999 and more recently voicing his support for the EU constitutional treaty. Other major figures—Benjamin Coriat who produced the key *régulationniste* texts on the labour process, Pascal Petit who has analysed 'tertiarization' and the service sector, Christine André and Robert Delorme who have studied the pattern of state intervention—have also taken somewhat divergent paths, related more to their specific interests than to any core doctrine. The output of the School's second generation is similarly varied—Frédéric Lordon writes on economics and subjectivity and on pension funds, Bruno Aimable on the different forms of contemporary capitalism. Indeed, *régulationnisme* now seems to constitute at most a loose grouping, spanning a wide range of studies. The reasons for this dispersal are also partly conjunctural: in the 1970s, the Regulationists were seeking to overturn dominant social science paradigms, while offering an alternative to the orthodox Marxism of the PCF. By the 1990s many had shifted into the realm of policy advice to the centre-left: Aglietta, Boyer and Lipietz all wrote reports for Jospin's Conseil d'analyse économique between 1997 and theUMP's assumption of power in 2002.

Désordres dans le capitalisme mondial stems from Aglietta's current advisory role for Groupama Asset Management, a French fund manager linked to a large mutual insurance company, with a portfolio of €82bn at the end of 2008; Aglietta's co-author, Laurent Berrebi, is Groupama AM's chief economist. The book does not deploy any of Aglietta's earlier *régulationniste* terminology, but its attention to the different regimes of the four major economic zones discussed—institutional, social and political structures—indicates a certain continuity with the theoretical framework he had previously developed; in that sense the book's conceptual orientation clearly derives from Aglietta, with Berrebi principally contributing to its empirical aspects.

Published in March 2007, the book could not respond to the subprime crisis which broke out that year, and which only revealed its unprecedented scope and scale in 2008. It centres, rather, on the massive, uncontrolled US current account deficit which certainly was one of the most important factors behind the crisis. The book falls into three main sections. The first covers the evolution of the system as a whole since the East Asian crisis, which the authors regard as a key turning point, marking the world's entry into a 'new growth regime'. After 1998, the countries most affected by the financial turmoil turned away from a reliance on Western capital which had led first to currency collapse and then to the inept and dogmatic interventions of the IMF. They now made a decisive choice for export-led growth, generating structural payments surpluses and directing capital flows back to the industrialized countries. These flows, together with those from China and

Japan, took the form of cheap imports into the EU and especially the US, and became one factor in the shift to a generally deflationary economic climate. The other such factor was the triumph in the US and to a lesser extent the EU of the movement for shareholder value, which set very high profitability thresholds for new investment and thus restricted the demand for labour. In the postwar decades the corporations supplying consumer goods had often possessed strong and stable market power, but wage-earning households were able to obtain pay increases which cut into the monopoly rents this market power implied. Now, most workers could no longer apply such pressure, and could only increase their purchasing power by taking advantage of price competition in output markets.

Aglietta and Berrebi view this shift from generally inflationary to deflationary conditions as structural. They correctly argue that big increases in the prices of oil, cereals and other commodities did not trigger inflationary spirals in the industrialized countries because labour was too weak to obtain compensating pay rises, and therefore had simply to absorb the loss of purchasing power. However, waning inflationary pressures by no means signified stability. On the contrary: the pattern of the cycle merely altered, with monetary factors such as changes in interest rates becoming less important in determining investment expenditures; but, just for that reason, there was an increased likelihood of financial disturbances. Excess liquidity was no longer expressed by general inflationary pressure, but rather by asset-price bubbles. The inflow of capital from emerging industrial economies helped to feed one of the most acute of these, the dot-com bubble at the turn of the century. In effect, then, this first section of *Désordres* puts forward a periodization: after 1998, the global economy entered a new era, firstly because a significant group of countries broke away from the policies proposed for them by the US, bringing to an end a brief phase of uncontested US domination in economic strategy; and secondly because of the radical change in macroeconomic conditions brought about by this same move.

The central section of *Désordres* consists of studies of the four major economic systems whose interactions largely determine developments in the global economy as a whole: the US, Japan, China and the Eurozone. Each of these chapters makes an independent contribution to debates on the political economy concerned. Together, they indicate that the monetary and financial strategies adopted in these systems are incompatible and hence unsustainable. In the US, problems of macroeconomic control are closely related to widening socio-economic inequalities. Between 1979 and 2002, the net incomes of the poorest 20 per cent of taxpayers were virtually static, increasing in total by 4.5 per cent. Over the same period, the incomes of the richest 20 per cent rose by 48.2 per cent, while those of the richest 1 per cent grew by 111.3 per cent. The distribution of wealth is still more unequal,

with the top 1 per cent holding a third of the country's assets. Apologists for the US system claim that opportunities for individual advancement from lower to higher income bands compensate for these disparities. This is false: social mobility is positively related to income equality and has declined at the same time as labour market pressures and reductions in social protection have undermined the position of lower-income households. Tax cuts under the George W. Bush administration exacerbated these trends: between 2001 and 2003 the tax bills of the richest 20 per cent were reduced by an average of \$35,000, and those of the poorest 20 per cent by a mere \$27. The consequent structural budget deficits, aggravated by immense military expenditures, presented significant challenges for monetary policy, while the maintenance of relatively high levels of employment became a political necessity precisely because so many households had no protection against fluctuations in the labour market. Aglietta and Berrebi describe this need to sustain employment as 'the condition *sine qua non* for middle-class acceptance of the financial logic of shareholder value and of the economic governance which flows from it'.

Turning to US monetary policy, the authors observe that, under Alan Greenspan, the Federal Reserve's stance had nothing in common with the doctrine of mechanical control over inflation advanced by Milton Friedman. Declarations intended to shape market expectations—of growth and profitability as well as of inflation rates—became key instruments of policy for a Fed focused on avoiding a financial collapse that would lead to deflation, which would in turn render monetary policy ineffective. Greenspan took advantage of the downward pressure on prices from China and other Asian exporters, and of an acceleration in productivity growth, to maintain a highly expansionary policy stance. But the growing indebtedness of corporations under this regime in itself became a factor of instability. After the bursting of the dot-com bubble only a dramatic increase in household debt kept the economy close to full employment. As Aglietta and Berrebi observe, 'the real estate boom in turn is a generator of risks'. By 2006, a build-up of unsold dwellings and property prices 30 per cent out of line with their usual relationship to rents was calling into question the Fed's optimistic view of the real estate market.

However, in spite of their prescience on the causes of instability, Aglietta and Berrebi were rather too sanguine about the Fed's ability under Greenspan and then Bernanke to conjure the forces involved:

The balance sheet of the Federal Reserve is impressive. It shows that the central bank has become the single institution for macroeconomic regulation in the globalized economies. Its power over the markets is essential for financial stability. There can be no doubt that if the Fed had not given priority to the strategic management of risk at the crucial moments when the financial

markets were in complete disarray, a catastrophic financial crisis would not have been avoided.

In retrospect this is clearly too favourable a view of US monetary policy. However, the authors' sharp critique of EU and Eurozone policies appears even more justified by events since the publication of *Désordres*. The Eurozone economy has displayed chronic weakness, dating back to the early nineties and to two events prior to the creation of the single currency which should have given a new impetus to European construction: the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Treaty of Maastricht. The alibi of EU leaderships is always the need for 'structural change'. Aglietta and Berrebi comment:

To account for the stagnation, the two non-democratic institutions which govern the Eurozone, the Brussels Commission and the ECB, have a very simple explanation which they repeat with the obsession of a litany: it's all the fault of the labour market. The selfishness of wage-earners hanging on to their acquired advantages and rejecting 'flexibility' is the root of all evils . . . When Brussels jargon is decoded, structural reform means dismantling social protection. To adjust to globalization is to annul the social progress which was the engine of economic development and Europe's contribution to the advance of civilization after the Second World War. In short, it is to abandon social solidarity in order to espouse the inegalitarian society of the US.

Their account of the pusillanimous and dogmatic leadership of the EU is all too convincing. Only two, specifically macroeconomic, aspects of their critique will be mentioned here. Firstly, they qualify the EMU as a 'false' monetary union because it has no means of dealing with divergences within the Eurozone which, if they cannot be compensated, render the imposition of a common monetary policy economically dysfunctional. This is not a heterodox or idiosyncratic view. The generally accepted theory of monetary unions recommends dealing with such divergences ('asymmetric shocks' in the jargon) either by fiscal redistribution among the members of the union, or through a very high measure of labour mobility from regions with higher unemployment to those with more buoyant labour markets. Both mechanisms can be found in the US; neither in the Eurozone. This means that the only way the latter can respond to divergences is the painful and often ineffective path of wage deflation in the weaker regions of the monetary union. When the euro was introduced in 1999, the conversion rates from national currencies were chosen in such a way that internal tensions within the EMU were limited for some time. But today these tensions are increasing very fast: they involve a marked polarization between, on the one hand, Germany (together with Austria and the Netherlands), which posts growing current account surpluses, and on the other, Southern countries—especially Spain, Portugal and Greece—with widening deficits. Since the appearance of

Désordres these disparities have become much more menacing: the bursting of financial bubbles in the deficit economies makes the financing of those deficits more onerous, and threatens them with a brutal correction through collapsing incomes and employment.

Secondly, as Aglietta and Berrebi record, the Eurozone has no capacity to formulate an overall fiscal policy. The EU's central budget is tiny and there are no mechanisms to coordinate the policies of member states. The actual macroeconomic regime—the Stability Pact—merely exerts a general pressure for restriction, in accordance with simplistic arithmetic formulae and regardless of whether or not actual budgetary positions pose real difficulties. The outcome has been to push member states towards fiscal competition—reductions in social budgets and tax breaks for corporations. Such measures could, say the authors, destroy European construction without any difficulty. Only the combination of a high degree of social protection with resumed economic development can provide the basis for civic allegiance to the monetary union.

The book's discussion of Japan has become more topical since its publication because of the parallels drawn between the current downturn and the Japanese financial crisis of the early 1990s, which led to a prolonged period of stagnation. That crisis followed a pattern seen very frequently in the wake of capital-market liberalization in the 1980s: inflows of cheap capital helped to feed huge asset-price bubbles in equity and real estate. The aftermath in Japan is particularly alarming in the present context: when the bubbles burst in 1990, the banks were left with massive bad debts, collateralized by nearly worthless assets. The authorities' failure to stabilize the financial system and to sustain economic activity undermined growth for more than a decade. By the time monetary policy was drastically relaxed, it was too late: even with interest rates at zero, no one was prepared to borrow—households, companies and banks were all seeking to pay down debts and strengthen their balance sheets. This situation was aggravated by actual deflation so that, even at nominal interest rates of zero, it was still advantageous to hold money idle. For Aglietta and Berrebi, the rapid recovery of the Scandinavian economies in the early 1990s provides a telling contrast:

The crisis was dealt with immediately there. The banks were nationalized and recapitalized at gigantic budgetary cost. Debts were consolidated and removed from bank balance sheets, so that the pressure to reduce indebtedness was blocked and the banks were able to lend to new borrowers who could spend and thus generate income, while massive currency devaluations relaunched external demand.

Eventually, in Japan too there were major interventions in the currency markets which drove down the value of the yen and began to persuade

wealth-holders that Japanese assets might yield future profits. There are clearly lessons and warnings here for the management of the current global crisis—although its vastly larger scale and scope make it unlikely that even the best designed policy responses could produce an easy or rapid recovery.

Aglietta and Berrebi regard the structural position of the Japanese economy as very strong. There are obvious similarities between Japan and the Eurozone: both have an ageing population and a very mature industrial system. But Japan has two advantages the Europeans lack: innovation is rapid because, unlike the Europeans, the Japanese have not sacrificed R&D spending under the aegis of restrictive macroeconomic policies; and Japan is closely integrated into the Chinese development process, which will contribute a powerful and continuing external stimulus.

With regard to China itself, *Désordres* seeks to explain the political and social conditions that made the PRC's economic ascent possible, and to provide an evaluation of its performance as well as a sense of the difficulties it is likely to face in future. Throughout, Aglietta and Berrebi stress the importance of political autonomy, which has allowed developmental priorities to shape economic policies. They describe the shift away from central planning as 'permanent reform': market relations were introduced in a controlled and incremental way, beginning with specific sectors and regions. The production levels of state-owned enterprises were maintained even while market forces were given increased scope in the supply of additional output. The contrast between this transitional strategy and those adopted in the former Soviet Bloc could hardly be greater. But while China's growth has been impressive, the authors note its capital-intensive, export-oriented nature, and the inequalities and imbalances it has generated—within the population, between coastal provinces and inland regions, between urban and rural areas.

They also devote attention to the much debated question of the exchange rate, a source of tensions between Washington and Beijing. Pointing to the need for China to maintain high growth rates so as to contain unemployment, the authors conclude that the Chinese authorities should continue to manage the exchange rate and avoid premature liberalization of capital markets. Substituting internal for external demand as the main source of expansion can only take place slowly, because the infrastructural preconditions for a massive home market do not yet exist. Here they recognize the complementarity of the Chinese and American economies: the PRC's institutionalized lending to the US has been designed to boost its export sector, which had to be the main engine of growth in the absence of robust domestic demand. A further condition for any future removal of exchange controls is a more developed financial system, able to deal with fluctuating capital flows. Aglietta and Berrebi discuss the process of financial reform, detailing

moves to reshape the banking system and the creation of regulatory bodies since the 1990s, and suggesting that bond markets need to be expanded to enhance the stability of the country's financial system as a whole. The authors are careful, however, to avoid any implication that the PRC is gradually acquiring a set of 'uniform institutions based on the American model'. The key to understanding the story of China's reforms, according to Aglietta and Berrebi, is that 'there is no "one best way" but rather a diversity of types of capitalism which coexist and confront each other.'

In the final section of *Désordres* Aglietta and Berrebi deal with the growing tensions in the global economy. These have arisen because the strategies pursued in the four major economies are incompatible with each other, and there are no effective institutional pressures to render them compatible. The first part of their argument centres on the US's huge and unsustainable current account deficit. Here again Aglietta and Berrebi showed considerable prescience. They argued that the counterpart of the US external deficit was not only government borrowing, but, to an increasing extent, household borrowing. With popular incomes stagnant, and in the context of low interest rates, this produced a speculative bubble in real estate: the authors estimated (presumably early in 2007) the overvaluation at between 40 and 50 per cent. By that time, house sales and new construction were already weakening. Aglietta and Berrebi concluded that: 'The US is about to experience a long-lasting downturn in the real estate market . . . To support the fundamental value of housing and avoid a collapse in house prices and rents, a drastic cut in interest rates would be needed. But this is unrealistic until after a real estate crisis has broken out.' In these circumstances, 'the financial crisis of the US would break out before the American state was able to replace US households as the main borrower. For how can it be imagined that in such a case non-residents, who already recycle 40 per cent of US household debt through the financial markets, would continue to do so?'

Although this account does not give all the grisly details of the subprime debacle, it presents one of its central mechanisms with some precision. It is also worth noting that since the publication of *Désordres*, Aglietta has produced two books on the crisis giving a more up-to-date view of events: a full-length study, *Crise et Rénovation de la Finance*, and a shorter volume entitled simply *La Crise*. In these works, Aglietta adds to his analysis an argument for the establishment of countervailing power within corporate and financial governance systems themselves—so that, for example, households and ordinary business enterprises which have to make use of financial services can challenge the practices and pricing structures to which the banks and fund managers subject them.

Having examined the accumulation of '*déséquilibres*' in the world economy, *Désordres* then discusses the policies required to secure a soft landing—that

is, a gradual return to a sustainable US payments position. This aspect of the book has of course been overtaken by events: we now know that we were heading for a crash landing. But two points from Aglietta's and Berrebi's argument remain pertinent: firstly, they demonstrate that to maintain aggregate demand as the US deficit is brought under control, expansionary policies would be needed both in Asia and in Europe, especially in the more advanced economies. Second, the authors insist that to avoid such enormous imbalances in the future, it will be necessary to formulate policies in the major economies in a different way: 'the only valid perspective is that of a global growth regime as a whole.'

Looking beyond the current disorders to the longer-term future of the global system, they argue that at present, economic interdependence is becoming ever more intense, but policies in the main economic blocs are determined in a completely unilateral way. The focus of their analysis here is the international monetary system, which has allowed the disequilibria they identify to persist. While the US has 'deliberately exploited' the 'trump cards' given to it by the dollar's position as global reserve currency, it has refused any corresponding responsibility to manage global liquidity. In this situation the Asian economies have rejected capital inflows in dollars, leading instead to a massive and unsustainable capital flow into the US. But reform of the international monetary system cannot come about through the market, according to Aglietta and Berrebi. They point out that since 1971 the dollar has lost two thirds of its value against the D-mark/euro and three quarters against the yen, but its share in international currency reserves has hardly changed. Only a political process can define a monetary regime. However, 'at present there is no political force, nor even an influential pressure group, supporting the concept of a supranational monetary sovereignty'. The Chinese authorities' recent, rapid retreat from the idea of substituting IMF special drawing rights for dollars tends to confirm this view.

Aglietta and Berrebi instead envisage the emergence of strong regional currency blocs, taking the Eurozone as an (imperfect) model. These would allow member-states to borrow in a regional currency managed with some respect for their interests, rather than in dollars. Such monetary blocs would allow groups of states to acquire a degree of macroeconomic autonomy, without severing their connections to world trade—a vital component of growth, according to Aglietta and Berrebi. Moreover, under such arrangements, international capital flows could return to a more logical pattern, with outflows from wealthier countries contributing to development processes more centred on the needs of the populations in the emerging economies, and less on exports. This pattern of reform, unlike some of the Keynesian proposals being put forward today, would preserve global financial interdependence but seek to manage it in a more cooperative way. This in turn

would require, of course, much stronger representation of the developing world in international forums. Events since the publication of *Désordres* have not been encouraging in this respect: the EU, in a shameful abdication, failed to offer emergency assistance to its weaker member states such as Hungary—exposing them to the attentions of the IMF. In East Asia, on the other hand, greater use of the yen today and the renminbi tomorrow within the region's financial circuits may represent a limited, but feasible challenge to dollar hegemony.

Désordres concludes by looking at the policy implications of its analysis for Europe and, more specifically, France. With regard to the latter, Aglietta and Berrebi focus on the country's decline in competitiveness, and recommend measures to improve education and family policies, and therefore its capacities for innovation. The principal weaknesses of current EU strategies, as noted earlier, include the absence of co-ordination among the budgetary authorities of its member-states, and the priority accorded to meeting an inflationary threat that no longer exists. The fact that the Eurozone's macroeconomic course is set by an unaccountable European Central Bank further erodes the democratic legitimacy of the European project, while the continuing drive for labour market flexibility undermines social provision and contributes nothing to technical advance or development. Against this, Aglietta and Berrebi call for the reaffirmation of the 'primacy of politics', and for democratic control over a Union founded on genuinely 'shared sovereignty'. Above all, however, they stress that continuing development requires international cooperation among the three key zones—the US, Asia and Europe—if we are to avoid a protectionist break-up of the global economy, accompanied by increasing political antagonisms.

In *Désordres*, Aglietta and Berrebi provide a comprehensive account of the current position of the global economy, and lay out some of the possible trajectories along which it could move in a more multilateral future. The various chapters not only condense, but also make original contributions to, a large number of current debates: on shareholder value, on the growth of interdependence, on the very different socio-economic developments in the four major systems, on the US deficit and the related crisis, on international finance and the international monetary system. The book's focus on macroeconomics and financial processes means that many substantive features of economic development—its technological and environmental content, or its impact on employment relations—are not examined. Perhaps more significantly, there is an evident gap between the disordered present and the multilateral prospect the authors hold out: it remains unclear how the shift from one to the other might be achieved, given the complex of political and social institutions geared to defending the current arrangements in each of the powers they describe, and in view of the continuing—albeit, in their

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VERSO

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Peter Dews, *The Idea of Evil*
 Blackwell: Oxford 2008, £60, hardback
 253 pp, 978 1 4051 1703

GREGOR MCLENNAN

ON MALEVOLENCE

In his 1987 book *Logics of Disintegration*, Peter Dews sought to defend critical universalism against post-structuralist relativism, combining broadly Habermasian norms of socialized rationality with Marxian cultural critique. The result was an important intervention against the undertow of nihilism in the work of significant figures such as Derrida and Lyotard. Dews's latest book suggests that he has come to regard what may have felt like a few loose ends in the earlier work as nothing less than gaping holes. Always wishing to qualify standard Habermas with Adorno's emphasis on the impossibility of grasping 'the totality' purely in thought, Dews had noted that 'the resolution of normative questions in the narrow sense, questions of justice, still leaves open the evaluative question of the "good life"'. From the sidelines, this concern now moves to centre stage, as Dews seeks to explicate how it is that 'human beings, as rational, self-reflective agents, are necessarily oriented towards moral norms, that moral ideals are intrinsic to their identity, and yet that they consistently fail to realize those ideals, or even deliberately work against them'. In another passing comment in *Logics*, the *nouveaux philosophes*, otherwise dismissed, were credited at least for their interest in the non-rationalist part of Kant; for their call 'for a revival of metaphysical thinking'; and for their 'explicit espousal of the religious'—all matters which, Dews conceded, exposed definite taboos within late twentieth-century social thought. Now, too, these pre-existing hints of what we might call a post-secular outlook on morality and politics are greatly expanded, and largely affirmed, as part of the philosophical task of 'articulating our moral orientation to the world'.

The Idea of Evil can be regarded as post-secular not because social and naturalistic benchmarks for ethics and politics are being wholly cast aside (that would just be dogmatic *anti*-secularism), but, first, because religious understandings are not to be taken as necessarily opposed to secular understandings, and because 'an obstinately secularist approach . . . must miss the essential nature of evil'. The philosophical task, therefore, involves reworking 'issues once addressed by theodicy' alongside 'our modern commitment to freedom and rational insight'. Given this ambitious agenda, the 'central contention' is then rendered rather tamely as putting on record that deep conflicts and tensions 'continue to arise' between the contrary pulls of 'freedom and autonomy' on the one hand, and 'due recognition of the intractability of moral evil' on the other. Still, merely drawing attention in this way to the necessity of discourses of reconciliation is now regarded by post-secularists—including the revised Habermas—as the most urgent of matters, and Dews's illuminating re-reading of canonical thinkers takes forward that project.

Dews's approach to his dark and difficult pivotal notion draws initially on Jean Nabert's formulations of the 1950s, insisting that evil is not to be confused with wrongdoing, even of an extreme and chilling sort. Instead, evil is the consciously chosen enactment of something that is absolutely unjustifiable, something that 'absolutely should not be'. No excuses are possible or offered; no explanations are remotely adequate. The paradigm thus encapsulated, the search is on for the best, truest philosophical analysis of this almost ungraspably disturbing phenomenon, beginning with—and never fully surpassing—that of Kant. Dews counters prevailing interpretations that stress the rational, humanistic basis of the moral law by highlighting Kant's core conception of 'radical evil'—radical, as in: rooted in the nature of the fundamental freedom that defines our human subjectivity. Of course Kant envisages, and stands by, the kind of rational self that unhesitatingly wills the kingdom of ends for all. Universal human freedom, peace and happiness, for Kant, are not only *conceivable* solely on that basis, they are also *achievable* on that basis. This is why he is an inspiring as well as a brilliant Enlightenment figure. But the propensity for evil, being radical, is also ineliminable, because rational agents can always choose *not* to follow the moral law. This is not a matter of succumbing to natural desires and social interests, but knowingly pursuing those desires to the detriment of the good. Humanistic interpretations of Kant in which evil is essentially a matter of 'unsociable sociability' are therefore mistaken, Dews says. Rather, Kant's evil is an ab-original propensity within a founding duality, such that freedom is constitutively divided against itself.

But how, then, is Kant to secure the prospect of goodness and progress to which he is genuinely committed, in which happiness and moral

freedom advance hand in hand? Here Dews promotes the late *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* from its aberrant status within secular Kantianism. That work, he says, best explores the kind of (indispensable) moral phenomenology through which Kant's famous 'postulates' of practical reason—above all the supposition that God is the 'moral author of the world'—make most sense. Only faith in the dispensation of such a God, though we can know nothing of him, generates motivation sufficient for the triumph of the good. Rational conviction alone cannot do this, though recognition of the necessary role for religious faith in the undergirding of moral life is itself a kind of rational deduction.

Dews fills out the well-known instabilities in these Kantian reference points, but they necessarily centre the whole ensuing, at times engrossing, discussion of key developments in post-Kantian intellectual history. Kant's successors seek to overcome his sense of the diremption of moral being through some combination of three styles of thinking that Kant himself deliberately keeps in check: dialectics, naturalism and social-ism. The first of these also captures something of the other two, notably in Fichte's and Hegel's developmental notion of the self's moral upgrading. In Fichte, there is no recognition of a fundamental difference between acting from natural desire or sense of social esteem and acting wickedly: our basic drive towards true self-assertion or self-activity must go through these stages as part of the struggle to realize the essential unity of conscience and reason. Evil, in that scenario, is more a matter of getting stuck in a lower state of consciousness—torpor, habit, cowardice—than of residual diabolical will or moral bifurcation. We only see that it is evil once we occupy the higher state of reflection that, necessarily, is no longer capable of willing evil. Dews notes the continued attraction of Fichtean 'progressivist' views in which the will is reformable through gains in knowledge, reflection and determination. Yet this 'trivializes' the problem of evil, he thinks, by evading the implications of accepting and allocating full responsibility.

Hegel rejects the Kantian dilemma too, but is also suspicious of claims for the spontaneous 'natural' goodness in people. Our inner struggles, he argues, will never be resolved in terms of isolated subjectivity, whether conceived as torn or whole. Indeed the barring of the abstract particularist self from participation in the concrete universality of collective ethical life is what generates the whole problematic of good-versus-evil in the first place. When the contradictions of self-referentiality precipitate our 'collapse into the immediacy of natural desire', evil inevitably results. Thus, whilst Hegel, unlike Fichte, recognizes the reality of evil, for him its conquest requires the freely accepted 'social shaping of subjectivity'. In a series of instructive moves, Dews praises Hegel's 'persistent critique of subjectivism', his insight into the 'distinctively modern potential for evil', and his strenuous

engagement with Kant's 'God' postulate, through which God is reconceived as 'the progressive self-manifestation of reconciling power in the realms of human creativity, worship, thought and action'. Ultimately, though, Hegel's envelopment of the sequential forms of ethical life into the higher 'right' of world history in its dialectical upward movement serves only to rationalize individual and collective evil, retrospectively cast as impersonal historical 'moments'. For Dews, this represents a grievous abandonment of the concerns that more strictly religious outlooks preserve: undoing past wrongs, justice for the dead, redemption.

Before Schelling plumbed the obscure depths of the absolute 'unground' as a way of overcoming ethical dualism—under the guidance of which evil turns out to be the good 'regarded in its non-identity'—his early thought was proffered as a philosophy of nature. After Hegel, Schopenhauer resumes and transforms this thread in the tradition by way of an uncompromising attack on philosophical idealism's duplicitous continuation of 'speculative theology' by other names. The primary feature of his alternative metaphysics is blind imperative will, yielding no reason whatever to consider the world either sacred or purposeful or rational. In that context, 'inflicting pain on others' is how we might escape the will's 'tormenting pressures' on the self. This is a cop-out, Dews thinks, and he is disturbed to note that Schopenhauer's attitude has regained authority today in assorted psycho-social discourses. Happily, Schopenhauer's descent into conceptual paralysis can easily be traced. The arch-pessimist cannot finally tolerate the anguish attendant upon his naturalism, leading to cessation of will as the morally demanded solution. But this kind of serene ascension simply revokes Schopenhauer's earlier argument against the idealists that the antithesis between subject and object, crucial to his very articulation of the will, could never be overcome.

Nietzsche comes closer to complete consistency, accusing Schopenhauer himself of quasi-theological moralism. Instead, religion, philosophy and morality were all to be denounced as illusory and corrupting from any perspective based on truth, science and creative will. Genealogically stemming from historical struggles between nobles and slaves, judgmental talk of good and evil always, for Nietzsche, reduces to guilt-tripping evasion and slavish expressions of *ressentiment*, thus crippling the capacity for greatness. Dews adds complexity to this familiar image of Nietzsche by showing the ethical density of the dynamics and struggles of Nietzschean self-transcendence beyond morality. For Nietzsche, to look the world fully in the face we must give up the facile and self-serving distinction morality requires between faulty, dreadful past and glowing, pleasing future. The will to power must have willed all the wounds of the past to be just as they were, and must be prepared to will them all over again. Thus: 'everything petty, sick, ugly and

suffering returns . . . in ever-renewed cycles.' But Dews maintains that things are not quite eternally the same: the return tests and hones the will's affirmation of the entire interlocked whole that is not only our lot, but also our scene of action and embrace. He argues that in the doctrine of the 'eternal return', produced in order to hammer ethics, we see the unmistakable mark of someone 'obsessed with the question of redemption'. The traces of growth, pity and salvation contained within Nietzsche's sentiments here bequeath us the question, 'can we accept the end of transcendence *and* redemption?'

Levinas, 'locked in confrontation with Nietzsche', unstintingly seeks to show that we are not 'duped by morality', but he shares Nietzsche's sense of the anonymous and 'belligerent character of being'. Philosophy and politics are themselves culpable in this, since they strive to know and manipulate things from the standpoint of systematic totality, resulting not in rational control but in warlike violence and abusive instrumentalism. The ethical stance, by contrast, is rooted in our immediate, sacred apprehension of the human other. In this unconditional encounter, with our utter responsibility given and exposed, even as we accept our mutual non-identity, we glimpse the exteriority of infinity—'beyond being'—without ever ceasing to be wholly here and embodied. Dews takes us through the punishing and conflicted pathways down which Levinas pursues these themes, pointing up how, in the phenomenology of encounter with the face of the other, hatred and murder are intrinsically available as responses in addition to devoted commitment. Dews also explains that although Levinas supplies profound resources for rescuing morality and solidarity in the horror-strewn twentieth century, in his later writings the ethical again 'stands on the brink of bleak futility'.

Dews underscores the similarities between Levinas and Adorno, both shaped in the shadow of the Holocaust, not least in their common resistance to 'identity thinking' and rational totalization. As a critical theorist, Adorno has a more 'naturalistic account of the formation of subjectivity', and as a socialist he cannot accept that good and evil are stand-alone configurations of self and other fixed outside the irrational drives of the 'administered' world of capitalism, with its relentless offering of 'false unities' and its systematic prioritizing of economic interests over 'the free development of human powers and capacities'. But Adorno is neither a reductive materialist nor an explanatory historicist, in spite of his Hegelian leanings. His 'anarchic' vision of being resists the idea, shared by Hegel and Marxism, that moral emancipation is a matter of the ripeness or otherwise of historical conditions, and Dews derives from Adorno his own haunted conviction that past suffering and injustice must finally be remediable if the world is to be put to rights. Adorno is thus portrayed as remaining deeply entangled with the 'tradition running back behind Marx' in pursuit of fundamental moral and spiritual issues. He 'wrestles repeatedly with Kant's ethics'; cannot minimize

his sense of 'radical evil'; and 'sympathizes with the Idealists' desire for a more open, more inclusive conception of experience'. In the end, he 'swings back to a qualified restoration' of transcendence in the manner, if not the detail, of Kant.

The Idea of Evil is a meticulous, thoughtful study, robustly contending that all its featured thinkers either remain deeply involved in the Kantian moral matrix, or escape it only by diluting the gravity of the central problems. For Dews, it follows that, to be remotely convincing, any naturalistic, historicist and sociologistic approaches to moral progress must acknowledge the 'religious' investment we make in these matters. If Dews's story of theorizing over the past two centuries reveals a definite 'secularizing' trajectory, it nonetheless implies no simplistic endorsement of normative secular progressivism.

'Philosophy professor's twaddle', Dews reminds us, was Schopenhauer's blunt verdict on the way that the idealists smuggled God, unfeasibly depersonalized, back into Reason's heartlands. Could the 'obstinate secularist' not say something similar of Dews's own project, for all its finesse—indeed, *because* of all its finesse? After all, to go back to the phrasing of his 'central contention', Dews's mission is limited to pointing out recurring tensions between the secular mindset and the draw of religious faith on the persistence of evil and the difficulty of ethics. Having shown us how several philosophical giants failed to produce durable or coherent solutions out of such resistant materials, it is no wonder that Dews is content to place his own strongest emphasis upon ambivalence and antinomy, and the reflective wisdom that these modes nurture. Yet the agonistic post-secular sensibility in play here is not exactly in equipoise between alternative worldviews; nor yet does it quite manage to construct a third, because the most persistent message it transmits is that on the swirling seas of the moral life, the good ship Rationalism-humanism has been shown persistently to founder on the rocks of religion.

There is another issue upon which Dews seems ambivalent, perhaps to his cost: is it the fundamental moral *capacity* for evil that he is primarily concerned to unearth and reflect upon, or the *actualization* of evil in the world? With regard to the former, it is strange that Dews does not at least consider some 'naturalistic', Darwinian-evolutionary threads of explanation for this, even if he would certainly want to oppose any reductionism here. The quality and range of debates amongst scientists regarding the nature, extent and causality of altruism and its opposite can surely no longer be excluded from 'philosophical' discussions, as though they have no bearing on 'eternal' questions. Secondly, it is not clear that the 'capacity for evil' should be taken for granted as a singular, deep-rooted disposition, rather than a spectrum of inclinations and possibilities within our 'moral orientation'. Here is

where the matter of capacity necessarily begins to slide into considerations of actualization, which requires more emphasis on the profoundly contextual nature of evil's definition and occurrence than Dews seems prepared to grant. He begins by following Nabert's 'extreme' definition of evil, but goes on to produce a whole string of synonyms: resistance to betterment, perversity beyond control, penchant for harm and destruction, commitment to chaos, wilful pain-infliction, love of injustice, malicious wrongdoing, the urge to be cruel, desecration of the human. To be sure, none of these syndromes are anything less than fearsome, but some of them are closer to plain selfish 'bad' than others, and even his most extreme designations have contrastive terms built into them (betterment, order, justice, humanity)—without further analysis of which they make little sense.

The point here is not to say that utter evil does not exist, only that, against the drift of Dews's dilemmatics, the way in which the manageably bad often emerges out of rather better qualities and circumstances, and the way in which habitual malignity can then spiral into the wholly grim, obeys a social logic. In his outstanding *The Dark Side of Democracy* (2005), Michael Mann explains how this happens in cases of murderous ethnic cleansing. This is a fundamentally modern phenomenon, Mann insists from the outset, rejecting any simple resort to 'human nature' explanations (which do seem to gain traction in Dews's dissection of the 'deep structure' of 'our' moral subjectivity). Murderous cleansing typically arises in the messy anterior to democratization, in societies in which the *demos* and the *ethnos* become fused together (relegating class identities and socially defined group violence in the process). Inserting several further conditional clauses into these historical coordinates, Mann shows that perpetrators of radical evil emerge as different categories of actor—party-state elites, populist paramilitaries, and some part of the mass of 'ordinary people' (though never the majority)—each coming on to the scene at a different stage, and committing increasingly vile deeds as the desperate sense that there is no alternative escalates. Moreover, even the rankest evil-doers are variously motivated—by ideology, bigotry, fearfulness, careerism, discipline, love of violence, comradeship or bureaucratic zeal. (Mann omits to mention misogyny.) Finally, in the preponderance of cases, radical evil turns out not to be premeditated in the normal sense, nor is it a matter of sheer indulgence in gratuitous wickedness. Rather, it occurs as part of the process whereby 'Plan A' morphs into 'Plan B', the failure of which brings the previously unthinkable into view for the first time, whether as unavoidable necessity or paradoxical self-preservation.

Mann's perspective is consonant with Dews's in that Mann has no reason to doubt that some propensity for evil exists within all of us. How, Mann pointedly asks, do we know we would not do exactly the same in those circumstances? But the sociological argument damages the proposition that

we primordially and individually *choose* evil over good, and it undermines any clinical removal of the purely ethical texture of these matters from substantive considerations of people's ever-evolving interests, threats to identity and conditions of flourishing. It also suggests that whilst any social solution to evils is likely to be as complex as their social production, at least these are contingent matters; they can change according to different patterns of authority, resource allocation and fulfilling sociality. Indeed, we might want to insist that the very standards of measurement of evil are more thoroughly historical than Dews allows. After all, he quite sympathetically relates how Hegel describes those who transgress the norms of their decaying world as world-historical failures—their concepts and actions are out of tune with the ethos of the moving times. This argument may well be unconvincing as it stands, but historicism today might yield better formulations. Dews tends to rule it out of court from the start.

With sociology and historicity making inroads in these ways, further consideration of the phenomenological dimension, seemingly more important to Dews, results in no cleaner endorsement of his primary inclinations. Long passages in Sartre's *Saint Genet*, for example, represent a gigantic blow-up of Dews's identification of evil in terms of 'desecration of the human'. For Sartre, comprehension of the intentionality of the evil man must home in on its terrible purity and absolute 'lucidity' rather than its 'vile brutality' (which does not go away). Loathing himself and seeking the loathing of others, the evil man shows a complete lack of self-interest, pushing to the full his untrammelled freedom, acting poetically rather than instrumentally, extraordinarily alive in his attention to detail and method. Evil, perversely, thus represents the perfectibility of our project-oriented capacities, to the point where it is no longer even interested in itself—according to Sartre, only the good man is preoccupied with evil. Knowing the good better than it knows itself, despising its own good-defiance and therefore in a sense desiring the good, evil presses on.

Though there are some similarities between Dews and Sartre, the latter demolishes any assumption of equivalence between good and evil, arguing that of the two, evil is the more complex and encompassing motivation. Sartre also, at least implicitly, embeds evil firmly in the historical world, since Being itself, that which evil 'corrodes', is thoroughly historical in texture. These claims effect an intriguing reversal of our intuitions about how the basic moral categories connect to religion: it is the good that is mundane and limited, whilst evil operates according to purposive perpetual striving towards transcendence, towards 'other than being', engulfed in its addictive singularity. There is even a hint that, by the same token, religion might itself be construed as essentially evil, its own form of compulsive apprehension forever caught in an exhausting path of 'rudderless negation'. At any rate,

for Sartre, evil must not only continually devour and betray the good, it must restlessly devour and betray *itself*. Incapable of establishing a stable relation to being, it is unable to thrive beyond being, or tolerate it. Fascinatingly idiosyncratic as Sartre's scenario might be, his is nonetheless a definitively intra-human drama, the compounded realization of the good being dependant on no external moral author, nor requiring religious belief in such.

Dews might well deny that any of these considerations dilute the relevance of what he wants to say. After all, he never proposes that good and evil are anything other than wholly intertwined, or that evil operates outside the logic of social circumstances, or that deities exist, or that secular moral progress is impossible. Indeed, he is trying to show what it takes for moral progress to be properly entertained. And this only—but crucially—requires two things: a serious appreciation of evil's specificity and depth, and an acceptance that the 'metaphysical desire' that consistently makes its appearance when we try to hope beyond evil is in some sense 'religious'. That is what emerges from the concluding chapter, which restarts the whole discussion rather than winding it up. Borrowing from John E. Hare, three strategies for 'lessening the gulf' between our moral hopes and our evil-ridden human achievements are identified. We could 'reduce the demand'—but this will not work, given that postmodernist ironic particularism remains haunted by the universalism it can neither replace nor shake off. Alternatively, we could 'puff up the capacity' of humanity to rise to the task by way of a thoroughly naturalistic Kantianism—but Dews judges that arguments for 'valuing humanity', such as those of Christine Korsgaard, cannot be based on consistently naturalistic understandings of our situation.

The third move is to devise a secular substitute for the 'author of the world' that will guarantee the future closure of the moral gap. But Marxism, the obvious candidate, is assumed to have failed, and so this path to reconciliation is closed. It follows that the 'profound conflict between moral-political idealism and the intractability of evil' remains, a conflict that can be assuaged only through some kind of 'religious orientation'. Levinas and Adorno are then brought together once more, and again aligned with Kant, to produce a minimal version of the required approach. Levinas: 'unreserved concern' and 'glorious humility, responsibility and sacrifice' must ground and condition the life of the good community; they cannot be derived from it. Adorno: a transformed world requires the moral transformation of its participants, in advance and without qualification. For this to happen, worldly emancipation and transcendence must touch in a *sui generis* mode of 'metaphysical experience'.

Some kind of quasi-religious pre-commitment, some kind of metaphysical experience—it has to be said that such qualified, anchorless tropes are unlikely to appeal to serious gap-closers, whether of a wholeheartedly

religious or solidly secular sort. Moreover, the book's overriding message—that only if we completely accept that we are all to blame for the utterly desolate state of things, both past and present, can we move on—seems guaranteed to move us only to the conviction that virtually nothing can reasonably be done. Since this is not Dews's intention, he might have looked harder for better versions of the gap-closing strategies he identifies, and to consider them in combination rather than separately. A sociological approach like Mann's, for example, 'reduces the demand' without inviting despair. And if Marxism's demise takes it out of the running as God-substitute, this is just as well, partly because the third strategy is a wild goose chase, and partly because Marxism's normative and explanatory resources are more convincingly positioned within the 'enhanced capacity' argument.

Even if Dews opposes—inconclusively, to my mind—Korsgaard's worldly Kantianism, other articulations of a broad and nuanced naturalistic understanding of our human situation and prospects can be devised, and they can meet some of Dews's concerns whilst offering fewer hostages to religious revivalism. Our freedom to exercise moral choice, and our frequent anxiety in doing so, are not impossibly compromised by the fact that morality is 'naturally' social, or by the proposition that morality is 'naturally' something that we humans have come to regard, via the biological *longue durée* and thousands of years of socio-cultural change, as especially important to us. The problem and direness of evil are not improperly diminished by awareness that our social reactions draw on an 'evolutionary' repertoire that includes both altruism and harm. And whilst some of our inherited fantasies of what might lie 'beyond being' drop away as we increasingly view them as the natural (and changing) responses of a learning, thinking species that occupies one tiny part of a vast universe, other powerful conceptions and responses will come to take their place. Perhaps the most uncritical contention in *The Idea of Evil*—and it has become the veritable 'common sense' of contemporary post-secularism—is that all such forms of 'metaphysical experience' and 'metaphysical desire' are necessarily, but only *somehow*, 'religious'.

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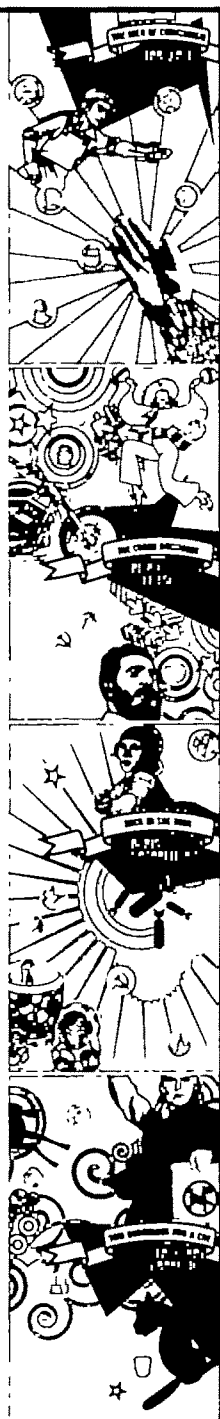
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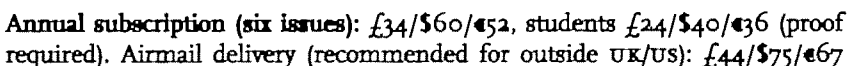
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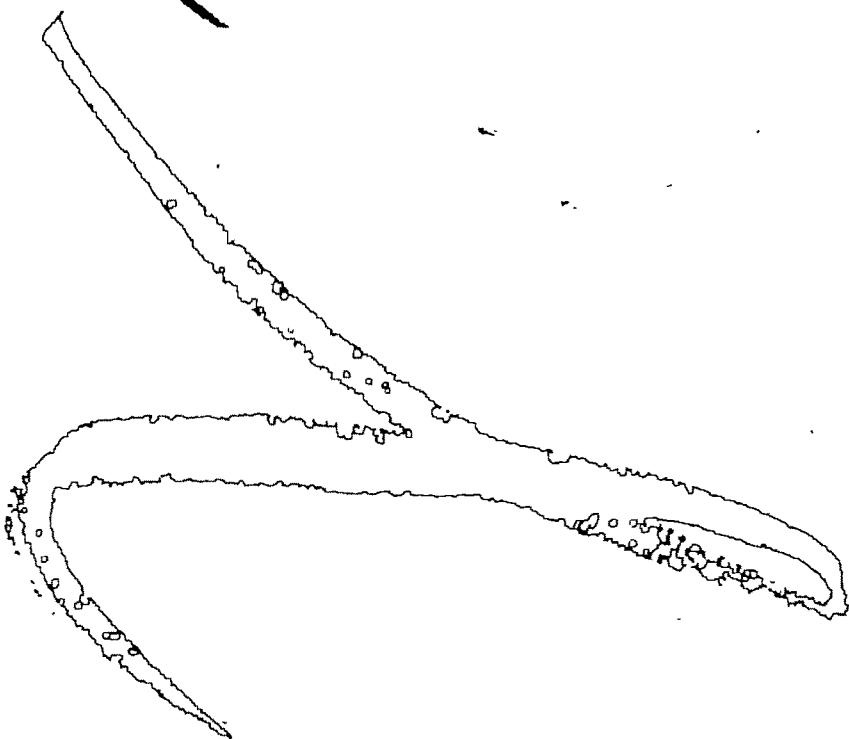
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